

River Otters of South Florida

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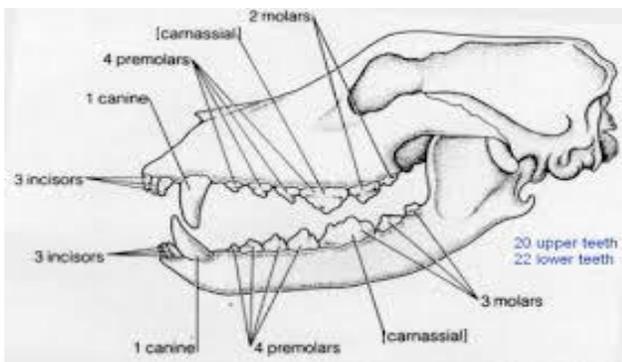


Otter Information

What's an Otter

First of all, an otter is a mammal which means they secrete milk from specialized glands, called mammary glands, to nourish their young. All mammals have hair. Mammals give birth to live young, although the platypus and echidna (spiny anteater) young hatch from eggs. The platypus lays its eggs in a nest burrowed in the bank of a stream. The young of the platypus and echidna feed on milk secreted from pores on the female's abdomen. While the platypus lays several eggs the echidna produces only one egg which is hatched in a specialized pouch on the female's abdomen called an incubatorium. Mammals have a four-chambered heart and their red blood cells have no nucleus. A muscular diaphragm is present in mammals and aids in efficient respiration. Birds also have a diaphragm and unlike mammals it is not muscular. The platypus has embryonic teeth that are replaced by horny plates that help process food the platypus consumes. The echidna has no teeth. The rest of the mammals have a series of differently appearing teeth along the lower and upper jaws. The shape and surface of these different teeth are specialized in the various mammals to process various, specific food types. The lower jaw of the mammal, other than in the echidna, is composed of a single bone. This, one-piece, lower jaw is far more rigid than the three piece lower jaw bone of reptiles. Otters are certainly mammals but, what kind of mammal?

Otters are classified as carnivores, as are canines (dogs), felines (cats), Ursids (bears), Hyaenids (hyaenas), Procyonids (raccoons and their allies) and the mongooses and civets. Being a carnivore means this type of mammal is adapted to eating meat. This adaptation is reflected in the modification of the teeth. The last premolar of the upper jaw and the first molar of the lower jaw are modified, self-sharpening, and work together to shear, rather than tear meat, from the carnivores' prey. Together, the upper last premolar and the lower first molar are referred to as the "carnassials".



The Skull of a Carnivore: The Dog

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