

**USE OF A FEMALE HELPER BY A COASTAL RIVER OTTER (Lutra canadensis)
IN PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND, ALASKA**

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We studied the ecology and behavior of North American river otters (Lutra canadensis) in Prince William Sound, Alaska during the summers of 1990 and 1991. As part of the study, 9 otters from the Esther Passage area were implanted with radio transmitters (6 males and 3 females). Two of the females were frequently found in association with each other (8 out of 20 radio locations in 1991) and were assigned a degree of association of 0.80. This contrasts with an average degree of association of only 0.36 for male otters in the same population. In August of both years, we observed these two females with a group of pups. Both females were seen feeding, carrying, and playing with the pups, despite one female being a subadult the first year of observation. Although cooperative breeding has been shown to exist in only a few species of mammals, these observations suggest that this behavior may be practiced by these coastal river otters in Prince William Sound, Alaska.

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