



# Cape Clawless Otters

(*Aonyx capensis*)



## INTRODUCTION

- Status in CCT:** Near Threatened
- Native range:** Sub-Saharan Africa
- Diet:** Carnivorous, apex predators typically feeding on crabs, fish, insects and frogs
- Behaviour:** Territorial and crepuscular, but can be active during the day and night
- Predators:** Python, crocodile, African fish eagle
- Threats:** Dogs, poaching, water pollution, habitat degradation



## COMMON ISSUES IN URBAN AREAS

- Cape Clawless Otters retreat to burrows (holts) when not foraging, and may make use of man-made structures such as drains, under buildings, etc. This may startle unsuspecting people.
- When fed human-derived foods, otters can become habituated.
- Otters can contract diseases like distemper, parvo and rabies from domestic animals.
- Otters can also transmit diseases to humans (zoonoses) and domestic animals if close contact is permitted.
- If they feel threatened in any way, they can exhibit defensive behaviour as a means of protecting themselves.
- Otters have been found on people's properties.
- As human development encroaches more on otter habitat, the occurrence of otter bites are occurring more frequently as per a scientific review published in the [IUCN Otter Spec. Group Bulletin](#).

## PREVENTATIVE MEASURES

There are a number of measures to reduce potential impacts from Cape Clawless Otters:

- Don't feed otters or any other wildlife. The feeding of wild animals is prohibited under the [Animal Keeping By-law](#) (2021).
- Do not litter – discarded food items still 'feed' animals and affect their health.
- Do not approach – allow animals space to move without feeling cornered. Wild animals are unpredictable in nature and can contract and transmit diseases from humans and domestic animals. Keeping yourself and your pets at a distance is best for your and the otter's safety and health.
- Should an otter approach you, back away slowly and give it space to move away.
- Avoid loud noises and flash photography that might startle wild animals.
- Increase vegetation cover to allow for safe movement of otters in open parks.

- In permitted dog-walking areas where otters occur, dogs must be kept on a tight leash and directed away from the animal.
- Improve awareness and guidance to visitors at spaces where otters occur.



*Cape Clawless Otters prefer habitats that offer plenty of freshwater and high vegetation to provide cover when they move on land.*



*Aerial view of various locations where Cape Clawless Otters occur in Cape Town.*

Cape Clawless Otters are a great indicator that the water systems is in good health and ecologically connected. As an apex predator, they play a significant role in the ecosystem. They generally avoid humans, but with increased human contact and access to human-derived foods, they tend to lose fear of humans and can show increasingly aggressive behaviour. Cape Clawless Otters are to be serenely observed from a distance in their natural state where they thrive best, away from people and pets. Taking a proactive, rather than reactive, approach is ideal. It is almost impossible to rehabilitate a habituated wild animal, and as a territorial species, removal usually results in another moving in, which can lead to the same issues for that animal.

Should you be faced with a Cape Clawless Otter on your property, back away slowly and allow it plenty of space to exit. Do not attempt to scare the otter away, and keep your distance. CapeNature and the [SPCA's Wildlife Unit](#) must be contacted for any injured or distressed animals as the relevant mandated authorities that are permitted to intervene.

Cape Clawless Otters are wild animals and may not be kept in captivity without a permit from CapeNature. According to the City of Cape Town [Animal Keeping By-law](#) (2021), no wild animals may be kept in captivity on any residential property without a CapeNature permit and a City permit from [CCT Environmental Health](#). If you are aware of a wild animal in captivity on a residential property or captured/hunted without a permit, contact [CapeNature](#), and/or the Cape of Good Hope SPCA's [Wildlife Unit](#) if there are welfare concerns.

## RESOURCES/FURTHER INFORMATION

[More information](#) | [Full list of NEMBA-regulated species](#) | [UCT: Otters in the urban context](#)

## CONTACTS

CCT animal-keeping permit applications:  
[CapeNature permits](#) | [CCT Environmental Health](#)  
 Injured wild animals/welfare concerns: [SPCA Wildlife Unit](#) | [Urban wildlife contact list](#)