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## HABITS OF THE OTTER

A few miles up the Clackamas River where the stream is bordered with tall firs and the water swirls among the boulders, a shrill whistle broke the silence. It was too loud and penetrating to come from a person. It filled the whole space, walled in by the ramparts of high firs. The note was plainly one of alarm or a cry for help, but who was in danger or where it came from, no one knew. From the sound, one expected something large but as nothing was in sight, the mystery increased.

Then with eyes scanning every part of the river, a small black head was discovered on the surface at the outlet of a stream. It looked like a mink swimming, but who ever heard a mink with such a resounding whistle?

On closer view, the little stranger proved to be an otter. In some way, he had become separated from the mother and like any child was crying loudly for help.

By maneuvering around, we caught the little otter. This made him mad as a wet hen. The whistle changed to a hiss and later to a whining note. As no mother appeared, the young otter was taken home and put in a wire enclosure. He had such a big square muzzle, so different from the pointed nose of a mink.

He finally escaped and took up a home under the roots of a big tree on the banks of the Willamette. He would take fresh meat or fish from the hand. It wasn't long before he learned to catch the chub/s and carp in the river. He stayed during the summer and fall, using an old floating log as a

sunning place. Toward winter, he went off up stream toward the mouth of the Clackamas from whence he came.

Formerly the otter lived along many of our Oregon streams. He wears a beautiful brown coat, which is a prize to any trapper. Herein lies the reason for a scarcity of otters.

The otter has followed a fisherman's life for so long that his movements are fish-like. His square looking face closely resembles the face of a seal. His tail is so thick where it joins the body that it tapers off fish-like to a point. He might have come from seal ancestors and developed feet and legs by spending part of his time on land.

What speed he has to catch a fish! He glides like a streak through the water, turning and twisting and catching a fish by swimming him down. His big webbed hind feet speed him along.

On land, he often moves as he does in the water. If the soil is wet and slippery, he loves to slide on his belly, his front feet hanging limp and his hind toes catching in the earth to push him along. His love of play is about the same as a boy going belly-buster down hill on a sled in the snow and steering with his feet. The otter slide is the beloved coasting place where these animals play.

Mr. Vernon Bailey of the Biological Survey described an otter in a tank. He came up from the bottom with his feet against the side of the tank, then pushing went over backward and gave a big kick with his hind feet, swimming the whole length of the pool on his back. Reaching the other end, he returned

with a graceful twist of his body, coming right side up to go  
back to the starting place and do it over again.