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SHE “OTTER” BE IN PICTURES!

-- *The Zoo welcomes new river otter to the Maryland Wilderness --*

BALTIMORE, MD – The Maryland Zoo is excited to welcome Piper, a one-year-old North American river otter (*Lontra canadensis*) to the Otter Stream habitat in the Maryland Wilderness section of the Zoo. Piper came to the Zoo from the Audubon Zoo in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Piper was found by a fisherman in Houma, Louisiana, when she was only about three-weeks-old. Piper was brought to the Audubon Zoo where she was hand-reared by staff until she was old enough to spend time in the Louisiana Swamp exhibit. “She apparently enjoyed running back and forth with children on the other side of the glass as well as honing her swimming skills,” stated Carey Ricciardone, mammal collection and conservation manager at The Maryland Zoo. “The Audubon staff began a training program with her when she was four-months-old and found her to be a very apt pupil, learning to come to a target for a treat while staff did overall body checks to help assess her health.”

North American river otters can thrive in many types of water habitats including ponds, marshes, lakes and rivers as long as there is adequate food to catch. Otters typically eat crawfish, crabs, frogs, bird eggs, and fish. River otters create dens along the waters’ edge in empty burrows and logs or abandoned beaver lodges. In Maryland, river otters live in tidewater areas across the state.

Otters are graceful swimmers. They can remain submerged for several minutes, dive to 55 feet and swim up to a quarter-mile underwater. They have short legs, muscular and streamlined bodies, small heads and long, powerful tails. “Otters are very agile and acrobatic. They love to swim and play and Piper is certainly no exception,” continued Ricciardone. “She has been exploring every nook and cranny of the stream habitat and seems to especially like seeing people who are in the underwater tunnel trying to take her picture.”

Piper and Mary, the Zoo’s older female river otter, will not be on exhibit together, but will take turns in the stream habitat. “Because Piper is so young and new to the Zoo, she will be only on exhibit from 10:00 am to 11:00 am in the short term,” said Ricciardone. “We will gradually increase her time on exhibit as she acclimates to her new routine. Mary will be in the exhibit when Piper is off.”

About The Maryland Zoo in Baltimore

Founded in 1876, The Maryland Zoo in Baltimore is the third oldest zoo in the United States and is internationally known for its contributions in conservation and research. More than 1,500 animals are represented in the Zoo’s varied natural habitat exhibits in areas including Penguin Coast, Polar Bear Watch, the Maryland Wilderness, African Journey and the award-winning Children’s Zoo. Situated in Druid Hill Park near downtown Baltimore, the Zoo is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums. For more information, visit www.marylandzoo.org.

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