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Virginia Zoo welcomes new Asian small-clawed otter pair

NORFOLK, VA – The Virginia Zoo is thrilled to announce the arrival of two new Asian small-clawed otters, Jilin and Elbe. The pair was sent to the Zoo from two other accredited facilities within the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) on a breeding recommendation from the Asian Small-clawed Otter Species Survival Plan® (SSP), which coordinates population management for the species in human care.

Jilin (JEE-lin) the male otter is 10 years old and made his first appearance on exhibit at the Virginia Zoo in November 2024. His name means “along the river” and is also a city in China. Elbe (eL-Bee), the female otter, is 3 years old and made her public debut this week. Jilin and Elbe have been getting acquainted with their new space and each other behind the scenes over the past month. as temperatures were too cold to give them outdoor, public viewing access.

The Zoo’s Assistant Curator of Asia, Jill Strother, says “The Asia Team is thrilled about our new breeding pair of (Asian small-clawed) otters! It’s exciting and rewarding to see the relationship develop between the two otters. They are both very curious about their exhibit and interactive with the keepers.”

The otter pair can be found in the Asia: Trail of the Tiger section of the Zoo in a shared habitat space with the white-cheeked gibbons. Over the next few weeks, the Asian small-clawed otters and white-cheeked gibbons will be rotated on exhibit as the two species are gradually introduced before sharing the space full-time.

About Asian small-clawed otters

Asian small-clawed otters are native to Indonesia, southern China, southern India, and the Philippines. They inhabit areas with freshwater streams, rivers, and creeks as well as coastal mangrove swamps. Asian small-clawed otters are the smallest otter species and part of the mustelid family consisting of weasels, skunks, badgers, and wolverines. Currently they are listed as Vulnerable by the IUCN Red List and their most prevalent threats are habitat destruction, pollution, poaching, and the pet trade.

About the Virginia Zoo

The Virginia Zoo, located in Norfolk, Virginia, is home to more than 700 exceptional animals representing over 150 fascinating species. Founded in 1901 and residing on 53 beautifully landscaped acres, the Virginia Zoo has demonstrated a commitment to saving and protecting the world’s wildlife by inspiring a passion for nature and taking conservation action at home and around the world. The Virginia Zoo is an accredited member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums and is recognized as a global leader in education, recreation, science, wildlife conservation, and animal care and welfare. For more than a century, the Zoo has connected adults, families and school children with the natural world and its wildlife. The Virginia Zoo is open daily from 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. with last admission at 3 p.m. For admission prices and to learn more, visit [virginiazoo.org](http://www.virginiazoo.org).

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