

PRESS RELEASE

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See photos at: <http://bit.ly/ottereyes>

Otterly awesome otter pups open their eyes!

SEATTLE—Woodland Park Zoo's quadruplet river otter pups reached a milestone this week: the 5-week-old pups have opened their eyes!



The North American river otters—two females and two males—were born to mom Valkyrie and dad Ziggy, both 5 years old. They are the first offspring for the parents and, as far back as the zoo's animal records go, it is the first river otter birth documented in the zoo's 119-year history.

"River otters typically open their eyes between 28 and 35 days, so they're right on schedule," said Deanna DeBo, an animal manager at Woodland Park Zoo. "Mom continues to provide excellent care for her pups and we're seeing appropriate weight gains. As they get stronger, they'll soon be walking. Right now they're using their bellies to move about." The pups currently weigh between 2 and 3 pounds apiece.

Valkyrie and her pups continue to live off view in a den so the new family can nurse and bond in a private environment. Animal care staff weigh the pups once a week to ensure continued weight gains and, as part of the zoo's neonatal program, animal health staff will perform wellness exams every several weeks.

A behavior that otter pups do not know how to do when they're born is *swim*. "Otters are such graceful, agile swimmers but it doesn't come naturally to them. They're born helpless and blind, so pups need swimming lessons by their mom," explained DeBo. "It's dunkin' otter time as the mom grabs the pups by the scruff of their necks and dunks them in and out of the water. It may look scary but the moms know what they're doing and otter pups are very buoyant," explained DeBo.

Once the pups demonstrate they can swim, Valkyrie and her pups will be given access to the public outdoor habitat where the pups can learn to swim safely in the deep pool and navigate the terrain.

The father, Ziggy, is currently separated and can be seen in the Northern Trail habitat with the zoo's other river otter, a 21-year-old male named Duncan.

Valkyrie and Ziggy were introduced to each other in 2015 under a breeding recommendation through the Association of Zoos & Aquariums' Otter Species Survival Plan, a conservation breeding program across accredited zoos and aquariums to help ensure a healthy, self-sustaining population of otters.

North American river otters are semi-aquatic members of the weasel family. Their habitat ranges over most of North America in coastal areas, estuaries, freshwater lakes, streams and rivers; they can be found in water systems all over Washington state. River otters consume a wide variety of prey such as fish, crayfish, amphibians and birds. At the top of the food chain, river otters are an excellent reflection of the health of local ecosystems.

All otter species are considered threatened while five of the 13 species are endangered due to water pollution, overfishing of commercial stock and habitat destruction. To help Woodland Park Zoo contribute information to sustainable breeding, husbandry and public awareness of the river otter, adopt the species through the zoo's [ZooParent](#) program.

In addition to river otters, the award-winning Northern Trail habitat is home to grizzlies, elk, gray wolves, mountain goats and Steller's sea eagles. The Northern Trail will be reimagined through the lens of the Pacific Northwest's exceptional ecosystem and will open in 2020 as Living Northwest. Funds raised through the Living Northwest Initiative will create a new exhibit experience that will be a revitalization of the Northern Trail and will become a hub for engaging zoo guests and community members around discovery, species recovery, human-wildlife coexistence, and saving the wildlife and ecosystems right here at home for the benefit of every species.

To donate to the Living Northwest Initiative, visit www.zoo.org/donate.

Zoo hours through April 30 are 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. daily. For more information or to become a zoo member, visit www.zoo.org or call 206.548.2500.

Founded in 1899, Woodland Park Zoo engages more than a million visitors of all ages, backgrounds, abilities, and walks of life in extraordinary experiences with animals, inspiring them to make conservation a priority in their lives. The zoo is helping to save animals and their habitats in the wild through more than 35 wildlife conservation projects in the Pacific Northwest and around the world. Woodland Park Zoo is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums and certified by the rigorous American Humane Conservation program. The Humane Certified™ seal of approval is another important validation of the zoo's long-standing tradition of meeting the highest standards in animal welfare. Visit www.zoo.org and follow the zoo on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

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