



**For Immediate Release:  
Friday, February 28, 2025**

## **MONROE COUNTY EXECUTIVE ADAM BELLO AND THE SENECA PARK ZOO ANNOUNCE BIRTH NORTH AMERICAN RIVER OTTER PUPS**

**Rochester, NY** – Monroe County Executive Adam Bello and the Seneca Park Zoo today announced that Ashkii, the Zoo’s nine-year-old female North American river otter, gave birth to a litter of three pups on Tuesday, January 28.

“For the first time in its 132-year history, the Seneca Park Zoo is thrilled to announce the birth of North American river otter pups in our care. These additions are a testament to the Zoo’s dedication to conservation and the vitality of the North American river otter,” **said County Executive Bello**. “Thank you to Zoo Director Bob Lee, Dr. Chris McKinney, General Curator David Hamilton, and the entire staff at the Seneca Park Zoo for their dedication and attention to the three new river otter pups.”

“The pups all appear healthy on their initial examination,” **said Dr. Chris McKinney, Veterinarian at Seneca Park Zoo**. “Two of the pups are female and one is male. Ashkii is taking excellent care of them, and they are nursing well.”

Mom Ashkii was born in 2016 and came to Seneca Park Zoo in March 2020. The pups were sired by Gary, who was transferred to the Zoo in 2023 based on a breeding recommendation from the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) cooperatively managed Species Survival Plan® (SSP) Program. While Ashkii had a litter prior to arrival at Seneca Park Zoo, these pups are the first North American river otters born at the Seneca Park Zoo.

“This is a remarkable and proud moment in the history of the Zoo,” **said Zoo Superintendent Bob Lee**. “These births further demonstrate the expertise and dedication of our team, who have made Seneca Park Zoo a leader in North American

river otter conservation, playing a crucial role in advancing the AZA's mission to safeguard this species and its habitat for generations to come."

**David Hamilton, General Curator at Seneca Park Zoo and North American River Otter SSP Coordinator for AZA, said** "This is the first time the Zoo has had a successful breeding pair in Ashkii and Gary, demonstrating the importance of the Species Survival Plan (SSP) program. The North American River Otter SSP produces a Breeding and Transfer plan with the goal of maintaining a self-sustaining river otter population that is healthy, genetically diverse, and demographically stable."

It will be several weeks before Ashkii introduces the pups to swimming in their habitat, but guests have a rare chance to view the pups virtually at the Zoo in the Creatures from the River's Edge building, where they would normally see the river otters. The cam will be active when the Zoo is open to guests beginning Saturday, March 1, 2025.

The North American river otter is a semiaquatic mammal that lives only in North America, throughout Canada and along the coasts of the United States and its inland waterways, including tributaries of the Genesee River.

The Zoo has long been involved in North American river otter conservation, starting in the 1980s by assisting with translocating otters, which were regionally extinct. As a bioindicator of ecosystem health, the presence of otters in a river or tributary is a positive sign. Using cutting-edge technology, the Zoo targets waterways to test for evidence of otters. Through the analysis of water samples, scientists identify otter DNA, helping us provide vital science on the success of the otter reintroduction campaign that the zoo was a part of in the 1990s.

The Zoo is open daily from 10 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. For tickets visit [senecaparkzoo.org/tickets](https://senecaparkzoo.org/tickets).

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Internationally, and in our own backyard, Seneca Park Zoo plays a key role in species survival. Chartered as an educational institution in 1957 by New York State, the Seneca Park Zoo Society plays an integral role in supporting Monroe County, the owners and operators of the Zoo. Together, we are working to bring animals back from the brink of extinction.