

An Unexpected Encounter

Â June 19, 2017by Jody Aston, Editor and PublisherÂ

While sitting at my table with the front door open, one day my little Schnauzer, Susy, went tearing out the door with greater gusto than usual. From the corner of my eye, I spotted the blur of an animal running in front of her. Dark in color, too big to be a cat, tail too long to be one of our frequent visitors, the cotuza (sometimes called agouti)â€I grabbed my camera and headed after them to investigate. What a surprise to see an otter stopping to hiss and growl at Susy, then continue in a half-hearted waddle down the street! It turned into the yard of a neighborâ€™s unoccupied house, and seemingly knowing exactly where it wanted to goâ€I went straight for the slime-filled old swimming pool. With a splash, s/he dove under the blanket of swampy algae but quickly resurfaced to concentrate on Susyâ€™s whereabouts. With more fierce growls, quite a show ensued, as the otter swiftly and smoothly navigated around the perimeter of the pool, â€œchasingâ€ Susy as she ran along the edge. (Click "Read more..." below for more story & photos.)

Â After getting a few photographs of our strange guest, Susy and I left the otter to swim in peace. I thought to myself, â€œJust another fun, unexpected encounter that makes living in Guatemala such a joy!â€ For those curious about the biological and ecological factors, the otters we have here in Guatemala are called Neotropical River Otters (*Lontra longicaudis*). In Spanish, the name is Nutria, and locally, Guatemalans call them Perros de Agua â€“ Water Dogs. From my trusty â€œTraveller's Wildlife Guide: Belize and Northern Guatemala,â€ by Les Beletsky (highly recommended, by the way), I discovered that river otters forage alone or in pairs and are active in both day and night. They are in the Mustelid family, along with other weasel-like animals, such as skunks, tayras, and grisons. Seen mostly in or near the water, otters do spend some time in burrows on the land. Females, especially, burrow under tree roots, or under rocks to give birth. They have 2-3 young, which are born blind and helpless. One thing is for sureâ€the one Susy and I met was not young, because it was definitely not helpless!