



## What is the purpose of Sea Otter Awareness Week?

- ☞ Defenders of Wildlife developed Sea Otter Awareness Week in 2003 as a natural extension of Defenders' Bear and Wolf Awareness Weeks.
- ☞ It provides the opportunity to broadly educate the public about sea otters, their natural history and the conservation issues they are facing.
- ☞ It allows researchers, academia, zoos and aquariums, marine institutions, the conservation community, and businesses to interact with, inform and involve the public in sea otter research and conservation.

## Why are sea otters important? How do they affect humans?

- ☞ Sea otters play a critical role in the marine ecosystem as a keystone species. They promote a healthy kelp forest that, in turn, supports thousands of organisms.
- ☞ Sea otters are the top predator in their ecosystem.
- ☞ Wildlife viewing is one of the most popular activities among tourists and residents of California.
- ☞ Sea otters are indicator or sentinel species. They are dying of a tremendous amount of disease that has land-based connections. Humans and sea otters eat many of the same seafood items. High rates of sea otter disease may be a warning for both human health and marine ecosystem health.

## Sea otter systematics

- ☞ Common names: Southern or California sea otter; Northern sea otter; Russian sea otter
- ☞ Genus/species/subspecies: *Enhydra lutris nereis*; *Enhydra lutris kenyoni*; *Enhydra lutris lutris*
- ☞ Smallest marine mammal in northern hemisphere.
- ☞ Largest member of Family Mustelidae; relatives include ferret, badger, mink, river otter, etc.

## Historic and current range/population census

- ☞ In the early 1700's, before wide-scale hunting began, their worldwide range was continuous from Japan-Baja California and the population was estimated at 300,000, possibly with a million or more, with approximately 16,000-20,000 along California's coast.
- ☞ Sea otters are now only found off the coast of Japan (less than six), Russia, Alaska, British Columbia, Washington, and California.
- ☞ Standardized census of the California population was initiated in 1983.
- ☞ California sea otter population counts are conducted twice a year, in the spring and fall, along the entire range.
- ☞ Spring counts are considered the most reliable due to more favorable viewing conditions and consistently higher annual numbers.

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# Sea Otter Awareness Week Facts

## Southern sea otter management issues

- ☞ The final southern sea otter recovery plan, a blueprint to guide, assist with, and implement sea otter recovery, was issued in 2005.
- ☞ The two primary management objectives for the California population are to increase sea otter abundance through reducing sources of mortality and increase the size of their range.
- ☞ Population decline – since the causes of declines occurring over the last decade are not entirely known, it is difficult to identify and implement a management action, rather it will be necessary to implement various management actions.
- ☞ Conflicts with fisheries – sea otters are curious by nature, making them susceptible to entanglement in nets and traps and they eat many things that are commercially or recreationally harvested.
- ☞ Results from sea otter research will have a significant impact on the future management of the sea otter population.

## You can make a difference!

- ☞ A number of non-governmental agencies, researchers, educators, federal and state agencies, and others are involved in sea otter recovery efforts.
- ☞ Support effort to control urban, industrial and agricultural runoff that carries chemicals and biological pathogens into the oceans.
- ☞ In California, if you come across a stranded or dead sea otter, report it immediately. You can call the Monterey Bay Aquarium Security Desk: (831) 648-4840 (For live, dead, sick, distressed and/or injured sea otters) or you can go to this site to find out what to do: [www.defenders.org/sea\\_otter\\_mortality](http://www.defenders.org/sea_otter_mortality)
- ☞ Support efforts to minimize entrapment of marine mammals and birds in fishing nets.
- ☞ Purchase products harvested sustainably (guides are available from Blue Ocean Institute, Audubon Society and the Monterey Bay Aquarium).
- ☞ Support efforts to remove the “no-otter zone” from Point Conception, near Santa Barbara, to the Mexican border.
- ☞ Helpful links:
  - <http://www.defenders.org/seaotter/awareness/>
  - <http://www.mwvcrc.org/>
  - <http://www.mbayaq.org/cr/sorac.asp>
  - <http://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/owcn/>
  - <http://www.seaotterresearch.org/>
  - <http://ecos.fws.gov/speciesProfile/profile/speciesProfile.action?sPCODE=A0A7>
  - <http://www.werc.usgs.gov/Project.aspx?ProjectID=91>
  - <http://alaska.fws.gov/fisheries/mmm/seaotters/recovery.htm>

For more information, you can contact Jim Curland, Marine Program Associate at [jcurland@defenders.org](mailto:jcurland@defenders.org) or (831) 726-9010

**Adopt a Sea Otter!** Visit: [wildlifeadoption.defenders.org/seaotter](http://wildlifeadoption.defenders.org/seaotter) for details!  
Enter the code **SEA15** at checkout and receive a 15% discount on your adoption.