

Sea Otter Fact Sheet



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Sea Otter

Enhydra lutris

The largest member of the weasel family, the sea otter is also the 2nd smallest marine mammal. Sea otters have the thickest fur in the animal kingdom, ranging from 250,000 to a million hairs per square inch, which insulates them and maintains warmth. Unlike other marine mammals, the sea otter does not have a layer of blubber (fat) to help keep it warm.

Length California sea otters: 4 feet; northern sea otters: slightly larger

Weight 45 lbs (females); 65 lbs (males). Northern sea otters can reach up to 100 pounds.

Lifespan 10-15 years (males); 15-20 years (females)

Diet

Sea urchins, abalone, mussels, clams, crabs, snails and about 40 other marine species. Sea otters eat approximately 25% of their weight in food each day.

Population

Historically, sea otters numbered between several hundred thousand to more than a million. But due to the fur trade, worldwide numbers plummeted down to a total of 1000-2000 in the early 1900s. As of 2010, the three-year running average is approximately 2,700 southern sea otters off the coast of California. There are between 64,600 and 77,300 northern sea otters residing in Alaska, Canada and Washington. There are approximately 15,000 in Russia and less than a dozen in Japan.

Range

The sea otter's historic range stretched from Japan, along the coast of Siberia and the Aleutian Chain and down the Alaska, British Columbia, Washington, Oregon and California coast to Baja California. Currently sea otters can be found in California, Washington, Alaska, Canada, Russia, and Japan.

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Behavior

Sea otters live in shallow coastal waters off the northern Pacific. They are the only mammals other than primates, and a few other animals, including birds, known to use tools. They use small rocks or other objects to pry shellfish from rocks and to hammer them open.

Sea otters spend much of their lives in the water and can dive up to 330 feet when foraging for food. They sometimes rest in coastal kelp forests, often draping the kelp over their bodies to keep from drifting away.

Reproduction

Mating Season throughout the year

Gestation 6-8 months

Litter Size Generally one pup, but sea otters can give birth to twins.

Threats

Oil spills, habitat loss and degradation, food limitation, disease, fishing gear entrapment and conflict with shellfish fisheries.

Legal Status/Protection

*CITES, Appendix I, **Endangered Species Act, ***Marine Mammal Protection Act

*Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, an international treaty with 172 member countries. Appendix I listed species cannot be traded commercially. Appendix II listed species can be traded commercially only if it does not harm their survival.

** The Endangered Species Act (ESA) requires the U.S. federal government to identify species threatened with extinction, identify habitat they need to survive, and help protect both. In doing so, the Act works to ensure the basic health of our natural ecosystems and protect the legacy of conservation we leave to our children and grandchildren. California, or southern, sea otters are listed as "threatened" under the federal ESA and "fully protected" under California state law. The Southwest stock of northern sea otters in Alaska is listed as "threatened" under the ESA. In Canada, the sea otter population in British Columbia is classified as "threatened" by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada.

*** The Marine Mammal Protection Act prohibits, with certain exceptions, the killing or harassment of marine mammals in U.S. waters and by U.S. citizens on the high seas. It also prohibits the importation of marine mammals and marine mammal products into the U.S. All of the sea otters in the U.S. are protected under the U.S. Marine Mammal Protection Act.

For more information about what Defenders is doing to help, visit Defenders' Imperiled Species: Sea Otter pages:
www.saveseaotters.org

Sea Otter Alliance -

<http://www.seaotterresearch.org/>

Sea Otter Research at WERC -

<http://www.werc.usgs.gov/otters/>

Adopt a Sea Otter! Visit: wildlifeadoption.defenders.org/seaotter for details!

Enter the code **SEA15** at checkout and receive a 15% discount on your adoption.