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## **Boy Scout Troop Leader Receives Reward Providing Information Leading to the Arrest and Conviction in Sea Otter Shooting**

**MONTEREY , Calif.** -- Defenders of Wildlife has awarded \$2,500 to David Lewis for providing information that led to the arrest and conviction of John Aaron Bishop for the shooting of a southern sea otter on March 22, 2003, at Montana de Oro State Park near Morro Bay. According to the San Luis Obispo County District Attorney's Office, Mr. Bishop of Bakersfield pleaded no contest to charges of shooting and killing a sea otter and possessing a handgun in a state park. Mr. Lewis witnessed the shooting and immediately informed officials.

"We applaud the quick and thoughtful actions of Mr. Lewis," said Jim Curland, Defenders of Wildlife. "His actions remind us all that there are members of the public willing to step forward to help preserve endangered species in this state."

Mr. Lewis was leading a Boy Scout hike when he came across an injured sea otter. Before any action could be taken to save the animal, Mr. Bishop appeared and shot the otter. Mr. Bishop claims that he shot the otter to put it out of its misery. The sea otter is protected under both the federal Endangered Species Act and Marine Mammal Protection Act and has a "fully protected status" under California state law, making it a misdemeanor to harm or kill them. Currently, the California sea otter population is estimated at 2,500 animals.

"We want people to know that when they find sick or injured animals such as a sea otter, they should contact state or federal wildlife authorities instead of taking matters into their own hands," said Greg Sanders, sea otter coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "It is illegal to kill endangered animals, including sea otters."

In the marine ecosystem, sea otters are considered "keystone species," meaning that their presence or absence has a significant impact on other marine species and marine ecosystems. Sea otters help sustain vital marine ecosystems by feeding on shellfish and other plant-eating species that would otherwise consume kelp forests. Kelp forests, in turn, serve as important breeding grounds for many types of fin fishes.

"I hope that anyone with information that could help find people involved in illegal animal killings will do the right

thing and call the authorities,” stated Roy Stearns, Deputy Director, California State Parks. “Individuals with such information can call the Caltip poaching hotline at 1-888-334-2258. In addition, we want to remind people that firing a weapon in a state park is illegal” Caltip is a hotline set up through the California Department of Fish and Game and all calls to the hotline can be made anonymously.

Previous Defenders of Wildlife rewards remain outstanding for the killing of a sea otter that was found in mid April of 2000 in Santa Barbara County, another sea otter found in September 2000 in Monterey Bay, otters found shot in March and August of 2002 in Santa Barbara County, and an additional otter found shot in June 2002 in San Luis Obispo County.

Defenders of Wildlife's reward comes from their Imperiled Predator Reward Fund established in 1998 to bring illegal predator killers to justice.

For more information on California sea otters, please visit [www.saveseaotters.org](http://www.saveseaotters.org).

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*Defenders of Wildlife is a leading nonprofit conservation organization recognized as one of the nation's most progressive advocates for wildlife and its habitat. With more than 430,000 members and supporters, 90,000 in California alone, Defenders of Wildlife is an effective leader on endangered species issues. To stay current on hot topics in wildlife conservation, subscribe to [DENlines](http://DENlines), Defenders of Wildlife's electronic update and action alert network. To subscribe to DENlines or for more information on Defenders of Wildlife projects, please visit [www.defenders.org](http://www.defenders.org).*