

# Sea Otter



# Facts

## POPULATION

The Sea Otter is a marine mammal that has 3 subspecies: **Southern Sea Otter**, **Northern Sea Otter**, and **Russian Sea Otter**. The Southern Sea Otter is found in **California**. The Northern Sea Otter is found in **Washington, Canada, and Alaska**. The Russian Sea Otter is found off the eastern coast of **Russia** and several have been reported in **Japan**. Currently there are less than 3,000 Sea Otters in California, between 65,000 and 78,000 in Washington, Canada, and Alaska combined. And, the Russian population consists of approximately 15,000 with about a dozen in Japan.

## CONSERVATION

The Sea Otter was hunted to near **extinction** in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Today the species is protected under the **Endangered Species Act & Marine Mammal Protection Act**. The Southern Sea Otter & Southwest Stock of Northern Sea Otters in Alaska are both listed as **“threatened”** under the Endangered Species Act.

## FUN FACTS

Average length:

Male: 4-5 feet long

Female: 2-3 feet long

Average Weight:

Male: 50-100 lbs

Female: 30-70 lbs

Average Lifespan:

Male: 10-15 years in wild

Female: 15-20 years in wild

## OCEANWALKERS

Sea Otters live in **coastal waters & estuaries**. They use their flat, webbed hind feet to swim and have been known to swim up to 5mph. When diving, their nostrils and ears close and their whiskers, or **vibrissae**, help them to feel their way around. They use their paws to locate prey.



## CONSERVATION

Because Sea Otters are adept at hunting a variety of marine species their activities are sometimes viewed by some in the fishing community as **competition** for these resources.



For more information, contact Jim Curland, [jcurland@seaotters.org](mailto:jcurland@seaotters.org) or Frank Reynolds, [freynolds@seaotters.org](mailto:freynolds@seaotters.org). Follow us on Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/friendsoftheseaotter> & Twitter: [friendsseaotter](https://twitter.com/friendsseaotter)

PO Box 223260, Carmel, CA 93922 • 831.915.3725 • [www.seaotters.org](http://www.seaotters.org)

## CONSERVATION

Crude **oil spills** kill Sea Otters in two ways. The black substance saturates their fur, eliminating the insulating air that keeps them warm, causing Sea Otters to get too cold. In attempting to restore the air insulation by grooming their fur with their mouths and claws, the Sea Otters **ingest** copious amounts of oil and die from **organ damage**.



### FUN FACTS

Average hairs per square inch on a human head: 700

Average hairs per square inch on a sea otter: 170,000 to over 1 million.

## FUR

Unlike most marine mammals, Sea Otters do not have **blubber** to protect them from the cold ocean water, but instead have the **thickest coat** of any animal in the animal kingdom and rely on that fur to keep them warm and from suffering from **hypothermia**. Sea Otter fur is comprised of two layers, the long outer **guard hairs**, providing a protective covering and the dense and fine **underfur**. You may have seen their somersaulting behavior, which is a means to trap air bubbles in their fur, adding the extra insulation they need.

## CONSERVATION

Sea otters are a **keystone species** for kelp forests, meaning they have a disproportionate effect on this habitat. When sea otters are present, they keep the **invertebrate grazers** of kelp in check and balanced and the result is a healthy **kelp forest ecosystem**.



## EATING

Sea otters **forage** for food using their **dexterous** front paws and highly sensitive noses. The vibrissae, or whiskers, in their nose act as fingers; they can move individually and feel out where their **prey** is. Prey can include a myriad of different foods, including sea snails, mussels, crabs, clams, abalone, sea urchins, & many other animals. The sea otter's teeth are ideal for **crushing** and **grinding**, but for prey that are more difficult to crack open, sea otters have been observed to use rocks as **tools**. After preparation, Sea Otters eat their food on the surface of the water,

### FUN FACTS

Longest recorded dive: 7 min.  
Deepest recorded dive: 318 ft.

### FUN FACTS

Sea Otters **consume** from 25%-30% of their body weight in food each day.

You can also get involved by becoming a member of Friends of the Sea Otter, donating money towards conservation work, or volunteering your time. To find out more, please visit us at [www.seaotters.org](http://www.seaotters.org)