

Sea Otter



The sea otter is the largest member of the animal family that includes ferrets and weasels. It's the second smallest of the marine mammals, the group to which whales and dolphins also belong. Unlike other marine mammals, sea otters do not have a layer of fat to help keep them warm. Instead, they have the thickest fur in the animal kingdom. Their fur has up to a million hairs per square inch! Sea otters are also one of the only mammals known to use tools. They use small rocks or other objects to pry shellfish from rocks and to hammer them open. Their diet includes sea urchins, abalone, mussels, clams, crabs and snails. They eat about a quarter of their weight in food each day. Once there were about a million sea otters. Thanks to the fur trade, only about 1,000 to 2,000 were left by the early 1900s. Today, there are about 2,750 southern sea otters off the coast of California. There are between 64,600 and 77,300 northern sea otters in Alaska, Canada and Washington.

Habitat and Range: Coastal waters of California, Washington, Alaska, Canada, Russia and Japan.

Threats: Oil spills, habitat loss and damage, food limitation, disease, entanglement in fishing gear and conflict with shellfish fisheries.

To learn more, see video and hear what sea otters sound like, visit www.defenders.org/animals.

Fun Facts

Sea otters can dive as deep as 330 feet when foraging for food.

Sea otters swim up to 1 mph on the surface and 6 mph underwater.

Sea otters don't "haul out" on land very often; they spend most of their time in the water.

