In the Spring 1999 Raft I detailed the month-by-month progress report on FSO staff's advocacy, education and scientific efforts toward promoting the recovery of the southern sea otter (Enhydra lutris nereis), which has suffered a 12% decline in the population since 1995. Since that publication, things have been just as busy or busier. The executive director, Jeff Calder, and I spent a good part of September in meetings in Washington, D.C., Sacramento and Santa Barbara. We met with staff from the California State Senators' offices, three California Congressional Representatives, House Resources Committee, and Senate Environment and Public Works Committee; Lori Williams, Assistant Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS); representatives from key environmental/conservation organizations (Environmental Defense Fund, Humane Society of the U.S., Center for Marine Conservation and Defenders of Wildlife); representatives from the Marine Mammal Commission; and, finally, the new director of the California Department of Fish and Game, Robert C. Hight.

What's On the Horizon
This is just the beginning but an extremely important step toward what lies ahead for FSO. When you receive this Raft, the Marine Mammal Commission (MMC) will have had their three day meeting (October 19-21) in Seaside, California (neighbor to Monterey). The majority of the first day agenda is devoted to discussions on the status of the southern sea otter population; evaluation of the translocation program and management zone; discussion of the vessel traffic/oil spill risk proposals; a review of southern sea otter research priorities, plans and sources of funding; and, lastly, an update on the Washington state sea otter population. This agenda outline from the MMC Tuesday meeting mirrors the activities that FSO has been and will continue to be involved in for the foreseeable future. This also sets the stage for how FSO members and the general public can get involved in pushing on all fronts for the recovery of this remarkable animal.

Status of the Southern Sea Otter
Before exploring tangible ways by which you can help, it is important to review what has brought the southern sea otter to where it is today. As mentioned previously, the population has declined from a high of 2,377 observed in Spring 1995 to a low of 2,090 in Spring 1999. The Fall 1999 census will begin on November 1 and results should be known by the end of that month. What has caused this dramatic decline in the population still leaves many perplexed. There are no clear answers. The following are four of the main factors commonly mentioned by the sea otter biologists and marine scientists as possibly contributing to the decline: continued on page 2.
from various stakeholders from federal and state agencies, conservation/environmental groups, researchers and research institutions, fisheries groups, the Southern Sea Otter Recovery Team and others):

- Population Surveys
- Demographic and foraging studies
- Fisheries Interactions
- Disease and contaminant studies
- Marine environmental research (prey species)
- Human recreational impact on sea otters
- Captive population research and management

What You Can Do!!!

Now that these critical areas of research have been identified, it is the job of both FSO and the public to find out: Why was the funding for sea otter research programs, through FWS, stopped in 1993? Why did the FWS not have any funds to direct towards completing the spring 1999 census? Why have critical programs, such as the demographic and foraging studies carried out by Dr. Jim Estes, USGS, BRD, had severe budget cuts? Why is there a severe lack of funding to be directed towards any of the identified research needs? These are questions that Continued on page 4
I wrote as soon as I heard that Mrs. Owings died. She truly was a friend of the sea otters. I feel so compelled to express my feelings. So, I'm finally going to send you my 4-H Report. In the fourth grade I was told to write a report on anything I wanted to. Of course I would never do any report unless it was on sea otters. So I used my two favorite stuffed animals which I explain in the report.

THE OTTERLY AMAZING SEA OTTER
BY: NIKKI McClanahan

INTRODUCTION
My name is Nikki McClanahan. I am 9 years old and in the fourth grade at Glade Hill Elementary. Mrs. Sandy Hunt is my teacher. As most of you may already know, this is my first year at Glade Hill and my first year in 4-H. The title of my speech is “THE OTTERLEY AMAZING OTTER”. I chose this topic because I love animals, and sea otters are one of my favorites. I think otters are fascinating creatures.

First, allow me to introduce you to Opey Alan Otter & Olivia Elaine Otter or “opie and ollie”. As you may have guessed, they are sea otters and also my inspiration for choosing this topic. Opey & Ollie will be married one year this Halloween. They have one pup; his name is Oliver Alan Otter or “Little Al”. Now I will tell you about Opey & Olley’s family.

FROM LAND TO SEA
Long ago, Oppey and Olley’s ancestors were happy to lounge all day on land. But over the years these mammals - and otters are mammals - got smarter and moved into the water.

Haven’t you ever wondered why otters can’t stay underwater all the time the way most sea creatures can. Otters can only hold their breath for about five minutes then they must come up for air. However, they spend most of the time floating on the surface of the water in beds of seaweed or kelp. So when it comes to swimming, they are the experts, and they love the backstroke! They’ll only swim on their stomachs if they have to make a quick getaway - like escaping from a shark.

TEDDY BEARS OF THE SEA
Since they started out as land animals, otters don’t really look as if they belong in the sea - no gills, no tentacles, not even a fish tail! In fact, most people often say that otters look a lot like cuddly teddy bears. Their entire bodies are covered with thick fur that keeps them warm in freezing water. Their front paws look like puppy paws and their back feet are webbed like a duck’s.

MARVELOUS MOMMIES
Female sea otters are very loving and take good care of their babies. The mother keeps her babies clean by licking their fur with her pink tongue. When the otters are little, they can’t swim very well. So their mothers make sure they’re not swept away by the tide. They scoop their pups up in their paws and wind them together in strands of giant kelp attached to the ocean floor: you might call it an otter anchor! That way the pups float on top of the water and stay put while their moms go scouting for food.

PLAYFUL PUPS
Like children, young sea otters like to play games and splash in the water. When they’re old enough to swim on their own, they race and wrestle one another, play tag, turn somersaults.

TUMMY TABLES
Otters may act a lot like us when they’re playing, but they have very different table manners! They snatch a clam from the bottom of the sea, and rest it on their tummies! Then they crack open the clamshell and eat the tasty morsels. Simply amazing! Otters use tools just like we do!

SAVING THE OTTERS
This last part is very difficult for me to believe; and realizing how all of you feel about animals, I’m sure it will shock you.

This fact is very distressing to Ooppie and Olliey. Now that you know more about otters, they were hoping that you would help them. Perhaps one day you will be in a position to make laws, donate money, or save the life of an otter; and knowing more about them will assure us that you will make the right decision.

To Margaret Wentworth Owings,

Sitting here looking out my bedroom window I can hear the steady cries of sea otters around the world. I hope you will dwell with otters in heaven.

– Nikki McClanahan

P.S. Enclosed is $25 deposit to renew my membership. I’m deeply sorry about Mrs. Owings.
FSO has asked and will continue to ask of the appropriate state and federal agencies and politicians. It is now time for you to ask these same questions. We need to be persistent and demonstrate, through strength in numbers, that we won’t accept this fate for the southern sea otter. The late co-founder of FSO, Margaret Owings, told me before she died how FSO used to get busloads of members at meetings. At recent sea otter issues meetings, many from the fisheries community came out to speak about their concerns. When we discovered later that there were only a handful of FSO members and/or concerned non-members in the audience, we reconfirmed the necessity to mobilize the conservation/environmental community. It is essential to recapture this enthusiasm and dedication through letter writing campaigns, petitions, attendance at critical meetings and other avenues which would succeed in getting the message out:

SEA OTTERS ARE AN INTEGRAL COMPONENT OF THE MARINE ECOSYSTEM AND WE SHOULD WELCOME, NOT SHUN, THEIR RETURN TO WATERS THEY ORIGINALLY OCCUPIED. WE MUST FIND OUT WHY THEY ARE DECLINING AND DO WHATEVER IT TAKES TO REVERSE THIS TREND.

Here are some suggested places to write (and look out in the near future for a form letter on our website; http://www.seaotters.org that you can use as a template):

√ Jamie Clark, Director
   U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service
   Department of the Interior
   1849 C Street, NW, Room 3256
   Washington, DC 20240

√ Mike Spear
   California/Nevada Operations Manager
   2233 Watt Avenue, Suite 120
   Sacramento, CA 95825-0509

√ Mary Nichols, Director
   California Resources Agency
   1416 Ninth Street, Suite 1311
   Sacramento, CA 95814

√ Robert C. Hight, Director
   California Department of Fish and Game
   1416 Ninth Street
   Sacramento, CA. 95814

√ Your State Senator(s)

√ Congressional Representative(s) whom you can locate through the following website; http://www.house.gov/writerep

When you write your State Senator(s) and Congressional Representative(s), be sure to bring up the need for critical sea otter research and the current lack of funding. Ask them to support an appropriations request by California Congressman Sam Farr asking for $1.7 million a year for the next five years.

Final Thoughts
In critical times such as these we look to our membership, as well as non-members, for support. The time is now! We greatly need and appreciate your involvement. End

Just in time for Holiday Gift Giving!

Introducing
"Sea Otter Sanctuary"
Chardonnay, Rosé & Merlot
Produced by
"A Taste of Monterey"
700 Cannery Row
Suite KK
Monterey, CA 93940
831-646-5446
fax 831-375-0835
website:
tastemonterey.com
email:
info@tastemonterey.com

Delivery available to most states
portion of proceeds benefits
Friends of the Sea Otter
Southern Sea Otter Health and Mortality: Questions Surounding the Population Decline


Population surveys confirmed that the southern sea otter population has continued to decline for the fourth consecutive year, escalating concerns about the implications of this decline for the overall recovery of the southern subspecies of sea otter. To try to pinpoint the cause of the decline, we were among many teams of scientists who met with the Southern Sea Otter Recovery Team in Monterey in April to share and discuss their current research findings. But despite the broad and diverse body of knowledge shared by the scientists in the April meeting, the essential cause (or causes) of the decreasing otter numbers remains elusive. What do we know, what don’t we know, and why is there not enough data to clearly indicate the way to stop the decline?

In order for a decline in otter population numbers to occur, logic indicates either the numbers of animals being born into the population are decreasing or losses from the population (i.e. deaths or other movements out of the population) outnum-

ber the otters replaced through reproduction. U.S.G.S. sea otter biologist, Jim Estes reports that the population’s reproduction rate appears to be similar to that seen in stable sea otter populations. He also notes that the southern sea otter population’s reproductive rate has been largely unchanged in recent years. However, population surveys report that numbers of adult otters and dependent pups are both declining. So if reproduction is good while surveys indicate decreasing numbers of adults and pups, it is likely that sea otters are either leaving their known California range or dying at a rate that exceeds the numbers of animals being produced. Recent sightings of males south of Point Conception and north of Año Nuevo indicate some movement to the range peripheries and even a range expansion; however, these animals are still accounted for in the survey numbers and not enough otters have been found in other locations outside the current range to compensate for the population’s decrease in the central portions of the range. At the same time, beachcast carcases of sea otters recorded by the southern sea otter stranding network, have steadily increased, leading to the conclusion that high mortality rates are underlying the decline.

Infectious disease, environmental contaminants, habitat and food limitations, or fisheries interactions are all considered to be potential factors in southern sea otter mortality. Sorting out the relative importance of these factors to the decline is the challenge that now faces scientists.

Beginning in 1992, our Center’s necropsy findings indicated that infectious diseases were occurring at the unusually high rate of 40% in the California sea otter population. Unexpectedly, diseases were affecting the reproducing adult otters at this rate in addition to the very young and old, and some differences were observed in the kinds of diseases that were occurring in different age groups. Generally, in the younger animals, fatal infections with acanthocephalan parasites (thorny-headed worms of the intestinal tract) accounted for most of the disease deaths, while in mature animals a variety of bacterial infections, protozoal infections of the brain and a fungal infection, coccidioidomycosis or San Joaquin Valley fever, were more common. The
level of disease mortality could well be slowing down the growth of the California population. However, the 40% disease mortality rate has been documented since 1992 and persisted despite the changing status of the population, from 5% growth in the early 1990’s to a decline after 1995. On the surface, changes in disease mortality rates do not coincide with the beginning of the decline. What differential effects infectious diseases are having on survival of critical segments of the population, or which diseases may be most significant still remain questions to be explored.

The variety, as well as the frequency of disease mortalities has been surprisingly high in California sea otters, leading us to wonder whether an underlying problem might be making the population more vulnerable to diseases in general. Environmental chemist K. Kannan of Michigan State University, helped assess the otters’ exposure to certain marine pollutants that might cause immunosuppression (reduced ability to resist infections). He did this by detecting concentrations of chemicals in tissues from a small sample of otters and comparing those levels among otters that died from different causes. The results indicated that tributyltin, a fumigant under restricted use in marine paints was present in higher concentrations in tissues of otters that died from disease. He also found that degraded forms of DDT-like compounds were fairly widespread but generally present in only low concentrations and PCB’s were also found in generally low levels except in the Monterey Harbor area. The results identify potential problems on which scientists need to focus but, by themselves, do not establish an explanation for either the otters’ rate of disease mortality or the population’s decline. To a certain degree, an animal’s body has the ability to store or detoxify many hazardous chemicals. This ability can vary in different species and the level at which sea otters can tolerate these particular chemicals is unknown. The next step in determining the significance of the chemicals we found is to determine whether the same compounds can predispose the otters to the rates and kinds of disease mortality we have observed in the otters, at the concentrations to which the otters are being exposed.

The observations of a raft of male otters south of Point Conception suggests that the California otter population may be facing food and habitat limitations, and that these are the cause of the decline. Ron Jameson’s article on sea otter range expansion in the Fall/Winter 1998 issue of The Otter Raft fully discussed the biology behind this event. Food and habitat limitations could be mortality factors in themselves, by causing starvation or dispersal into unsuitable or dangerous areas. In addition, the stress and debility associated with limitations of these resources potentially could be expressed as a variety of health problems that are difficult to relate directly back to the underlying cause. In order to begin to sort out the complicated interactions among habitat types, food availability and sea otter health, the status of population and its resources must be assessed by examining indices such as the otters’ movement patterns; proportion of their activity spent on searching for food; the abundance and size of their prey items; the size, distribution and quality of habitat in comparison with current otter locations; and the body condition of the otters themselves.

Entrapment in live fish traps and entanglement in gill and trammel nets is considered another potential source of mortality and cause for the current decline. In a recent USGS press release Jim Estes pointed out that the last serious population decline in the 1970’s ended after the State of California restricted setnet fishing, providing circum-
stational evidence of the significance of accidental entrapment. Drowning is difficult to identify by postmortem examinations alone; in addition, carcasses from a large proportion of the estimated mortality have not been found so some mortality factors could be escaping detection. Dr. Estes has been investigating the feasibility that sea otters could become trapped and drowned in live fish traps, and Dr. Karen Forney of the National Marine Fisheries Service has been estimating the impact that changes in legal gill and trammel net fishing activities could be having on otters. The preliminary estimates and accounts of accidental entrapment have not appeared sufficient to explain the level of mortality that would cause a population decline, but expanded studies are underway to better assess the potential.

So on initial review, there is no simple answer; no single known or suspected factor appears to explain the decline. The challenge for scientists is to continue to explore each of the potential factors affecting otter population numbers in efforts to determine whether a single factor is responsible for the current crisis. At the same time we must also investigate the likelihood that combinations or interactions of the different factors may be playing a more significant role than any single factor alone.

In the past two years as executive director of Friends of the Sea Otter, I have seen the organization change and evolve in exciting directions.

As we all know, our dear southern sea otter is facing a risky future. As detailed in this edition of The Raft and the last edition, the sea otter is on a slippery slope down in population numbers. The reasons are as varied as the marine environment stakeholders. At the same time, there are also many legal issues involving the sea otter.

FSO is currently active in securing grant money from federal, state and private funds. We have been successful in receiving some of the needed money for important research currently being done by the University of California at Davis and at the Marine Mammal Center. However, much more money is needed in order to address all the research proposals that have come across my desk – and are vitally important to the future of the southern sea otter. If you know of funding sources that could help us, please let FSO know.

We are the lead organization in advocacy in both Washington D.C and at the state level in Sacramento, California. Supporting us are well known organizations such as Center for Marine Conservation, Environmental Defense Fund, Defenders of Wildlife and The Humane Society of the U.S.

We encourage all of you to write to your elected officials as outlined in the lead article by our science director, Jim Curland. Know that Friends of the Sea Otter takes its mission seriously, "to protect and defend a rare and threatened subspecies at risk." Thank you for your continued support.

End

The Winner of our FINAL Annual Muscle Car Opportunity Drawing

1968 Shelby GT-350
Bob E.
of
Anaheim, CA
Winning Ticket Number
3431
Drawing was held on
September 25, 1999

Thanks to all who participated!
The International Corner

Jan-Olov Johnsson
Editor in Chief

Swedish Broadcasting Corporation

It had been fifteen years since I last stood in the harbour of Monterey and watched one of my absolute favourites among animals - the sea otters. Then I was making a short radio interview as a freelance journalist and there was no Aquarium. Now, I made a new interview, this time for the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation. And this day in February I was not alone, my eleven year old son travelled with me. He, and his two older sisters, has been bombarded with soft toys sea otters and stories from my first encounter. Now he stood there and watched them “live”. He, of course, loved them. After meeting the people who fought for the otters and hearing their discussions with some fishermen I realized the lines in the battle sometimes have certain similarities.

Shoot off the seals! It was over ten years ago that the Swedish grey seal did hit the FrontPages. The reason seals died in large numbers at the Atlantic coast of Scandinavia, starting on the Danish beaches. In the end about 60 percent of the animals had been found dead. Scientists were, as they normally are, confused at first and a lot of rumours were spread via media. One very popular, and it seemingly credible, explanation was that the immunysystem of the victims had been damaged by all the poisons and waste products that were dumped in sea. This happened to take place during an election campaign to the Swedish parliament, an event that occurred every third year then. The Swedish grey seal with its big, almost begging, eyes hard to resist and so this poor mammal was dragged into politics. No political party with any ambition to win votes could avoid “the seal question”, although the newly formed Green Party of course made the most of what happened. In fact, they were so successful in this that they got several seats in the parliament and gained a position they have maintained since then.

For the moment the ruling social democrats party depends on support from the green party as well on the very environmental focused leftwing party in the Sweden. Even today every Swede knows about the seals and one of the political parties had a seal on its posters during the last election campaign 1998. The fact that the scientist later claimed that the mass dead of seals were caused by a virus has not changed the environmental opinions among this very nature-loving people. The death of grey seals is a symbol for what can go wrong in the Nature that the Swedish loves so much. So, why this sudden demand to start hunting the loved seal? Why then this sudden shift in opinion? Once again it was the classical conflict between emotional values and money. No, not abalones, in that case the conflict lingers over salmon. Of course, there is no question that the increasing numbers of seals eats more fish, but the more interesting questions to ask:

First of all, is the salmon decreasing and in that case why? How big responsibility has the huge fishing fleets and what role does the newly discovered and still mysterious fish disease play in the drama? People that love animals often are accused of acting on their feelings, but as a science journalist I often have to ask myself, how exact are the facts? What do we really know and what do we assume? For example, no one knows how big damage the seal are causing, in fact no ones seems to know for certain how many seals we are talking about. The last public controversy over the seals was actually over the numbers of seals - and the figures shifted considerably between the authorities and the scientist.

So all that we know is how little we do know. In spite of all this, the old hunting behaviour rapidly came alive, why? One reason would be that the economic conditions for local fishermen are not good and something has to be done. It’s very tempting to look for simple solutions for complicated problems. But then you overlook so many other trends in our society, one being the changing task of another old trade - the farmer. In Sweden today the farmers proudly present themselves as keepers of Nature and guards of wildlife. So my guess is that the grey seals in Sweden will face the next millennium with confidence. We will find a consensus solution where those how experience trouble with big mammals will be economical compensated and maybe will find work as official seal keepers. I sincerely hope for this positive development also for the lovely sea otters. In fact, I will not come back to Monterey if they are not around, not even in fifteen years. End
MEMBERS BY STATE
As of 9/30/99

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MEMBERS BY COUNTRY
As of 9/30/99

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And Still Growing!!
Indeed, a worldwide organization!

"Sea Otter Health, Sanctuary Health & Our Health"
Forum
at
Patagonia
415 River Street
Santa Cruz, CA
November 11, 1999
7:30 p.m.
(west of Hwy 1 at River Street)
Showing new Friends of the Sea Otter Video "Lives in Balance"

Q&A with sea otter experts:
Jim Curland,
Science Director, FSO
Andy Johnson,
Monterey Bay Aquarium
Dave Jessup, OSPR
Michelle Staedler,
Monterey Bay Aquarium
Melissa Checowitz,
OSPR
 CENTER NEWS
Cathy Cole, Center Director

We had an *otterly* busy and successful summer season at The Center, welcoming about 200 visitors a day! The Center continues to serve as a key source of new FSO members and our in-store/mail-order/web-site sales continue to provide much needed funds for us to carry out FSO’s ongoing mission. Many thanks to all of our members who visited!

I am *very* pleased to include in this Raft an expanded Center catalog with many new educational and fun items! A few that might be of special interest to you are:

FSO’s 16 month Year 2000 Calendar for $12.95, featuring educational text and photography by Thomas Kitchin and long-time FSO dedicated members, Lee and Leora Worthington/Otterby, Inc.

*Voice from the Sea* written by Margaret Owings, FSO’s Co-Founder for $19.95

FSO’s Coloring and Activity Book and Crayons for $1.50

Pastel Sea Otter Fabric for $6.95/yard — only about 200 yards left so order soon!

Otter Bright Crazy Otter Fabric for $8.50 yard

Plush Sea Otter Children’s Backpack for $27.95 (available mid-November — but order early!)

Plush Sea Otter Golf Club Cover for $25.00 (available mid-December — sorry, no holiday guarantees, but order early and we’ll try our best to get it to you on time!)

We now also have a very special storybook available entitled *Olga and Oscar* for $7.50. This 33-page softcover was written and beautifully illustrated in black/white by FSO member Ingeborg Richter and translated from German by Gitta Wray. It is an endearing tale of two sea otters who become separated during an El Niño storm and their journey back home to each other. After eight consecutive annual visits to Monterey and many hours of joyful otter-watching, Ingeborg’s inspiration for this story was born. Now Olga and Oscar are the two best known sea otters in Germany!

I welcome all of you to visit our Education Retail Center! It is located at 381 Cannery Row, Suite Q, in Monterey, CA 93940/phone: 800-279-3088 or 831-642-9037/fax: 831-642-9057. We are open Monday-Saturday from 10am-8pm and Sunday from 10am-5pm Pacific Coast Time. The Center is located across from the main entrance of the Monterey Plaza Hotel and the closest cross streets are Wave and Drake. Or, if you’re unable to visit us in person, please visit our on-line store at www.seaotters.org. Our Center Staff and Volunteers are happy to help you out with any questions and/or suggestions you might have. We very much look forward to hearing from you!

Thank you all for your ongoing support of FSO and for the opportunity to work for this special organization. I wish you all an *otterly* delightful Holiday Season and a Happy Year 2000!

Memorials & Honors

2/19/99-9/30/99
Head Royce School
Oakland, CA
In Memory of Margaret Owings

Monterey Bay Sanctuary
Monterey, CA
In Memory of Margaret Owings

Judith K. Ashmore
Mequon, WI
In Memory of Frances L. Hobson
Gilliam

Donald C. Baur
Washington DC
In Memory of Margaret Owings

Elizabeth Bryer
Bellevue, WA
In Memory of Margaret Owings

Cecil Carnes
Santa Cruz, CA
In Memory of Margaret Owings

Arthur Dahl
Carmel, CA
In Memory of Margaret Owings
Capt. J.P.T. Dawson
Victoria, BC
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In Memory of Margaret Owings

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In Memory of Margaret Owings

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Fremont, CA
In Memory of Richard F. Case

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Morgan Hill, CA
In Honor of Marcia Ferguson for Mother's Day

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In Memory of Bob Ford

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Walnut Creek, CA
In Memory of Margaret Owings

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Carmel, CA
In Memory of Meredith MacLaury

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Eileen Growald
New York, NY
In Memory of Margaret Owings

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Carmel, CA
In Memory of Margaret Owings

Jack Harrod
Mary Jo Harrod
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In Memory of Sarah Seipp & Margaret Owings

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Sisters, OR
In Memory of Margaret Owings

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Eloise Hodges
Essex, England
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Granville Ferry, Nova Scotia, Canada
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Lillian Curland
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Manareneck, NY
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Silver Circle cont.

Donna M. Swayze
San Marino, CA

Jeffrey F. Thomas
Evelyne Thomas
San Francisco, CA

Diana Tiernan
Carmel, CA

Christine L. Van Dyl
Gilbert, AZ

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Ewing, NJ

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Mrs. Eleanor Visser
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Charles E. Wadsworth
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Tanis Walters
Pt. Reyes Station, CA

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Walnut Creek, CA

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Michel Willey
Carmel, CA

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Scarsdale, NY

Judith Winthrop
Port Angeles, WA

Leora M. Worthington
Warren L. Worthington
Salinas, CA

Thank You!!!

Our Mission
Friends of the Sea Otter (FSO) is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1968 dedicated to the protection of a rare and threatened species, the southern sea otter, as well as sea otters throughout their north Pacific range, and all sea otter habitat.