

## **Southern Sea Otter Facts**

### **Scientific Name:**

Enhydra lutris, or Enhydra lutris nereis

### **Physical Characteristics:**

4 feet long, approximately

65 pounds, males - 45 pounds, females

Strong canine teeth for tearing food, flat molars for crushing

External ears like a sea lion's with excellent hearing capability

Flattened tail flipper-like hind feet for propulsion

Forepaws with retracting claws like a cat's- for grooming & eating

Lung size is 2.5 times the size found in land mammals of same size

Extremely thick fur - about 600,000 per square inch

### **Senses:**

Strong sense of smell

Good eyesight both above and below the water

Whiskers used to sense vibrations in the water

Excellent sense of touch

### **Additional information:**

At one time there was a continuous line of otters ranging from the Kurile Islands of Japan, along the Aleutian Chain, down the Alaskan coastline past Washington and Oregon, along California's coast and into Baja California.

The southern sea otter, one of 13 different species of river and sea otters worldwide, ranges from Año Nuevo, north of Santa Cruz, to Purisima Point, north of Point Conception. There is, additionally, a small colony near San Nicolas Island off Santa Barbara.

The Alaska, or northern, and Russia sea otter populations differ from the southern sea otter in a number of ways based on size, weight, and food preferences. The southern sea otter is almost certainly a distinct subspecies, determined primarily by differences in skull measurements on otters from the different populations.

The sea otter is unique in that it is one of only a few animals known to use tools. Otters use rocks, other shellfish, or man-made objects to pry prey from rocks - they also use tools as hammers or anvils.

Otters feed on about 40 different marine invertebrates. They dive up to 180 feet foraging for food; otters in Monterey Bay generally forage in water depths of 60 feet or less. They use their forepaws or tools to dislodge prey from rocky areas.

Otters must eat the equivalent of 20 to 25 percent of their body weight each day in order to maintain a high level of internal heat production. Since they don't have blubber for warmth like other marine mammals, they compensate by generating a high metabolism by eating a lot. Additionally, they depend on their dense fur which they spend a large portion of each day grooming.

Grooming is the way otters force air bubbles down next to their skin. These air bubbles act as insulation for warmth and provide buoyancy.

The southern sea otter is considered a threatened population.

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