



#8891

## SEA OTTERS

Grade Levels: 5-12

26 minutes

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### DESCRIPTION

Sea otters, the ultimate surf bum, are the crucial element for kelp forests and their diverse ecology. Reviews the history of otters on the Pacific coast and their near extermination. Describes the otters' habitat, physical characteristics, behaviors, diet, and use of "tools." This member of the weasel family has the lushest fur in the world.

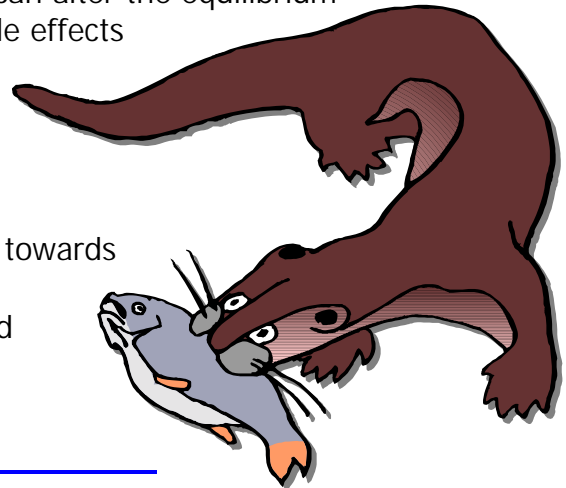
### ACADEMIC STANDARDS

#### Subject Area: Life Sciences

- ◆ Standard: Understands relationships among organisms and their physical environment
  - Benchmark: Knows that all individuals of a species that exist together at a given place and time make up a population, and all populations living together and the physical factors with which they interact compose an ecosystem
  - Benchmark: Knows ways in which humans can alter the equilibrium of ecosystems, causing potentially irreversible effects

### INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS

1. To study why sea otters were hunted.
2. To stimulate interest in protecting a species.
3. To develop a sense of responsibility and respect towards animals.
4. To identify differences between the sea otter and river otter.



### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Sea otters spend their entire lives in the often-frigid waters of the ocean, and because they have no insulating blubber, they must spend most of their time eating and preening. Otters eat up to one-third of their body weight every day, their metabolisms working rapidly to generate heat. Meanwhile, their thick rich coats keep the warmth in and the chill out.

Like so many misunderstood species, sea otters were once hunted relentlessly—partly for their beautiful fur and partly because they were seen as a threat to local

fisheries. By 1911, when sea otter hunting was banned, only about 1,000 remained, most of them living off the coast of Alaska.

Most sea otters still live in Alaska, but with successful translocation programs, sea otter populations are growing dramatically all along the West Coast. And with the otters come thick kelp forests filled with fish and shellfishlike crabs, abalone and snails.

## BEFORE SHOWING

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1. It is illegal to hunt sea otters, and they have few natural predators—yet they face a constant threat from human economic activity. What do you think that threat is?
2. Sea otters were land-based mammals that evolved for life back in the ocean. What types of changes would they have had to make to adapt to this kind of life?
3. Research some similarities and differences between sea otters and river otters.

## AFTER SHOWING

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### Discussion Items and Questions

1. Why do otters have to eat so much?
2. Why is a healthy otter population important for the near-shore ecosystem?

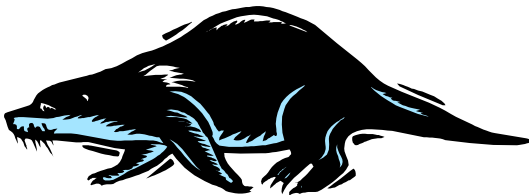
## RELATED RESOURCES

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### Captioned Media Program

- Protecting Endangered Animals #2000
- Sea Lions: Lessons on the Beach #3294
- St. Lawrence River Belugas #8908



## World Wide Web



The following Web sites complement the contents of this guide; they were selected by professionals who have experience in teaching deaf and hard of hearing students. Every effort was made to select accurate, educationally relevant, and “kid-safe” sites. However, teachers should preview them before use. The U.S. Department of Education, the National Association of the Deaf, and the Captioned Media Program do not endorse the sites and are not responsible for their content.

- **SEA OTTERS: FROM THE CRADLE TO THE WAVE**

<http://www.discovery.com/stories/nature/otters/otters.html>

Start a journey to see how one aquarium rehabilitates wayward otters and be on hand as the otters are returned to the wild. Find out where otters hang out, otter stories, and a few facts of this marine mammal.

- **FRIENDS OF THE SEA OTTER**

<http://www.seaotters.org/otters/>

Read current issues, understand the behavior, range maps, and more of the sea otters. Link to “Kids Area,” “Sea Otter Illustrations,” and more.

### SEA OTTER

[http://www.mnh.si.edu/arctic/html/sea\\_otter.html](http://www.mnh.si.edu/arctic/html/sea_otter.html)

The Smithsonian Institution gives a brief background on sea otters and what a 19<sup>th</sup>-century naturalist had to say about the sea otters.

