

# SEA OTTER PUP FACT SHEET

## OVERVIEW

---

Sea otters once populated the northern rim of the Pacific Ocean. By 1900 the Canadian species had been hunted to extinction. In 1971 the otter was reintroduced to the waters off Vancouver Island.

## VOCABULARY LIST

---

seaweed	kelp
otter	pup
flippers	water
urchin	wash
groom	dive
paw	chest

## FACTS FOR TEACHERS

---

### Appearance

- The sea otter is a marine mammal—a member of the weasel family.
- Male sea otters weigh about 34 kg. and females weigh about 20 kg.
- The large flipper-like hind feet are used for swimming. The front paws are used for holding food and grooming.
- The thick flat tail is used for steering.
- The eyes and nose are high on its head for ease of breathing and seeing when floating on its back. There is a thin film over the eyes to keep out sea water.
- They use their whiskers to search for food.
- The thick brown fur has two layers. The long guard hairs are very dense. Only the tips get wet. The short underfur is protected from the water. Air trapped between the layers keeps the otter warm.

- The nose, ears, lips and bottoms of the paws are not covered with fur. The otter floats on its back and keeps these parts out of the water.

### Range

- Sea otters once ranged around the northern rim of the Pacific Ocean. By 1900 the otter was extinct in Canada due to hunting.
- In 1971 otters were reintroduced off the coast of Vancouver Island. Small colonies are now well established.
- The sea otter was down-listed in 1996 from endangered to threatened.

### Habitat

- Sea otters live among kelp beds along rocky coastlines. They usually stay close to shore but rarely leave the water.

### Food

- Sea otters are carnivores. Food includes: mussels, crabs, sea urchins, clams, limpets, snails and fish. They mainly feed on sea urchins, consuming 35 – 40 a day.
- The otter has the ability to use tools. It floats on its back, props a stone on its chest, and bangs the shellfish against the stone until it splits open.

### Reproduction

- Sea otters gather in groups—pods or rafts.
- Females breed at 4 years.
- Pups are born year round, usually one at a time. Pups are born on shore then taken to the water. They are born with teeth and with their eyes open. Mothers hold the pups on their chests as they cannot swim. Pups are weaned at 2 months.

### Threats

- In the past the greatest threat was over hunting. In 1911 they were protected by Canadian Federal and Provincial Fisheries and Wildlife Acts.
- Present threats include habitat destruction and pollution.