

## **Northern Sea Otter (*Enhydra lutris*)**

### **Range:**

- Shallow waters off Alaska and the Aleutian Islands, the Commander Islands, the northwestern coast of Vancouver Island, and Washington.
- Southern sea otters are found in central California. Some scientists believe that Southern and Northern sea otter are separate species, while others believe that they are subspecies.

**Habitat:** Rocky coastal areas near points of land where some areas are protected from wind and waves.

**Status:** Secure as a species, although some populations are threatened.

### **Appearance:**

- Sea otters are related to weasels, skunks, river otters and wolverines.
- Fur color is typically dark brown. Their fur is the thickest of any mammal, with between 500,000 and 1 million hairs per square inch.
- Hairs, especially on the head, grizzle (whiten) with age on both sexes.
- Sea otters have small ears, streamlined bodies, short legs with webbed hind feet, and a somewhat blunt and flattened tail.
- They are graceful and playful in the water, but somewhat awkward on land.

**Size:** Body length (including tail) 4-5 ft. Weight for males 70-100 lbs; for females 50-75 lbs

**Life Span:** 15-25 years

### **Diet:**

- Sea urchins, sea stars, sea cucumbers, crabs, and molluscs such as clams, mussels, snails, squid, octopuses, and abalone.
- Sea otters will often use tools to help them to eat their hard-shelled prey. An otter will hold a flat rock on its chest and beat a shell against it until the shell breaks open.
- Sea otters need to eat 25% of their body weight each day!

### **Behavior:**

- Sea otters are social animals. They live in groups called rafts, ranging from a few dozen to over 100 animals. Large rafts are usually made up of females and their pups. Males are typically seen alone or in smaller rafts.
- Sea otters communicate with a variety of vocalizations including squeals, screams, coos, grunts, snarls, and growls. Baby sea otters are extremely vocal, especially when their mothers leave them at the water's surface while they look for food.
- They spend most of their day foraging for food and grooming their fur to keep it waterproof. Sea otters are the only marine mammal that does not have a blubber layer.
- Their high metabolic rate helps keep them warm in cold water.

### **Reproduction:**

- The breeding season extends throughout the year. With delayed implantation gestation, it is thought to be 7-8 months.
- Generally, the female gives birth to one pup every other year. Twins are rare.
- At birth, the pup weighs 3-5 lbs and is 2 ft. long.