



Sea Otter

(Enhydra lutris)



Quick Facts

Weight - 31 pounds to 99 pounds

Lifespan - About 10 to 20 years

Length - About 5 to 6 feet

Threats - Entanglement, Illegal feeding and harassment, Habitat degradation, Chemical contaminants, Oil spills and energy exploration, Vessel collisions, Disturbance, Disease

Location – North Pacific

About The Species

The heaviest members of the weasel family, but among the smallest marine mammals. Unlike most marine mammals, the sea otter's primary form of insulation is an exceptionally thick coat of fur, the densest in the animal kingdom. Although it can walk on land, the sea otter is capable of living exclusively in the ocean. It preys mostly on marine invertebrates such as sea urchins, various mollusks and crustaceans, and some species of fish. Its foraging and eating habits are noteworthy in several respects. First, its use of rocks to dislodge prey and to open shells makes it one of the few mammal species to use tools. In most of its range, it is a keystone species, controlling sea urchin populations which would otherwise inflict extensive damage to kelp forest ecosystems. Its diet includes prey species that are also valued by humans as food, leading to conflicts between sea otters and fisheries. Sea otters, whose numbers were once estimated at 150,000–300,000, were hunted extensively for their fur between 1741 and 1911, and the world population fell to 1,000–2,000 individuals living in a fraction of their historic range. Reintroduction programs into previously populated areas have contributed to numbers rebounding, and the species occupies about two-thirds of its former range. The recovery of the sea otter is considered an important success in marine conservation. It has a period of foraging and eating in the morning, starting about an hour before sunrise, then rests or sleeps in mid-day. Foraging resumes for a few hours in the afternoon and subsides before sunset, and a third foraging period may occur around midnight. Females with pups appear to be more inclined to feed at night. Under each foreleg, the sea otter has a loose pouch of skin that extends across the chest. In this pouch (preferentially the left one), the animal stores collected food to bring to the surface. This pouch also holds a rock, unique to the otter, that is used to break open shellfish and clams. There, the sea otter eats while floating on its back, using its forepaws to tear food apart and bring it to its mouth.



Coastal Brown Bears

(Ursus arctos gyas)

Quick Facts

Weight – 400 – 1500 pounds

Lifespan - About 25 to 50 years

Height - About 6 ½ feet to 8 feet

Threats - Illegal feeding and harassment, Habitat degradation, Chemical contaminants, Disturbance, Disease

Location – Aleutians though SE Alaska

About The Species

This is the largest distinct subspecies of brown bear. It is medium-hued, typically not as dark as most forms from eastern Asia, but distinctly darker than grizzly bears. The brown bear is often described as nocturnal. However, it frequently seems to peak in activity in the morning and early evening hours. Studies have shown that activity throughout the range can occur at nearly any time of night or day, with bears who dwell in areas with more extensive human contact being more likely to be fully nocturnal. Furthermore, yearling and newly independent bears are more likely to be active diurnally and many adult bears in low-disturbance areas are largely crepuscular. In summer through autumn, a brown bear can double its weight from the spring, gaining up to 400 lb of fat, on which it relies to make it through winter, when it becomes very lethargic. Although they are not full hibernators and can be woken easily, both sexes like to den in a protected spot during the winter months. Hibernation dens may consist of any spot that provides cover from the elements and that can accommodate their bodies, such as a cave, crevice, cavernous tree roots, or hollow logs. Brown bears have one of the largest brains of any extant carnivoran relative to their body size and have been shown to engage in tool-use (e.g. using a barnacle-covered rock to scratch its neck), which requires advanced cognitive abilities. This species is mostly solitary, although bears may gather in large numbers at major food sources (e.g., moth colonies, open garbage dumps or rivers holding spawning salmon) and form social hierarchies based on age and size. Adult male bears are particularly aggressive and are avoided by adolescent and subadult males both at concentrated feeding opportunities and chance encounters. Female bears with cubs rival adult males in aggression, and are much more intolerant of other bears than single females. Males take no part in raising their cubs – parenting is left entirely to the females.