

Sea Otters

Sea otters are amphibious mammals. That is, they live both on land and in the sea. As mammals, sea otters have hair and feed their babies milk. Sea otters come from the northern part of the Pacific Ocean, where it is very cold. Otters do not have blubber like other marine mammals, such as whales. Instead, they have an extremely thick coat of fur to keep warm – no animal has thicker fur. The fur on the surface of an otter's coat is waterproof. This keeps the cold water away from their skin. In order to live easily in the sea, otters have small ears and noses that can close to keep water out. They also have webbed hind feet so they can swim easily. Webbed feet work something like oars on a boat. Otters also have very long toes at the ends of their feet to make it easier for them to swim on their back. Otters are great swimmers, but these long toes make them very clumsy walkers! Otters also have short, thick, flat tails, also used for swimming. Their tails propel them through the water.

Full grown sea otters weigh between 30 and 100 pounds. They eat many different types of fish and shellfish. They eat many of the same kinds of fish that humans like. Because of this, otters and people sometimes compete for food. People have also hunted otters for their thick coats of fur. As a result, sea otters are now endangered and it is against the law to hunt them.

Sea otters hunt for food for a few hours every morning. Then they rest for a while and hunt again in the afternoon. Often, they eat again in the evening. Otters hunt at the bottom of the ocean floor. They are excellent divers and can hold their breath for up to five minutes at a time. Otters find food by using their sense of touch. Their front paws and whiskers are very sensitive, so otters can find food even in dark, cloudy water where it is difficult to see. They have pouches of skin across their chests that they use to store shellfish and other food they collect underwater.

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Sea Otters (Cont'd)

Then they swim to the surface to eat. Otters can turn rocks over to search for food, and they also use rocks to crack shells, make them among very few animal species can use tools!

Sea otters usually hunt alone, but they rest together in groups called rafts. Males and females form separate rafts that usually contain between 10 and 100 animals. In some cases, rafts of otters can number more than 2000. When otters rest, they sometimes wrap themselves in sea kelp so they won't drift out to sea.

Sea Otters Questions

1. The word amphibious means that an animal
 - a. can swim.
 - b. has thick fur.
 - c. lives both on land and in water.
 - d. feeds its young milk.

2. Otters are able to keep warm in the cold North Pacific waters because they have
 - a. blubber.
 - b. very thick fur.
 - c. Both of these
 - d. Neither of these

3. Otters have features that help them swim. These include
 - a. webbed feet.
 - b. long toes.
 - c. a flat tail.
 - d. All of the above

4. Otters have a hard time
 - a. swimming.
 - b. holding their breath long enough to find food.
 - c. walking.
 - d. finding a good place to rest.

5. Otters are endangered because
 - a. it is so cold where they live.
 - b. people have hunted them for their fur.
 - c. they often drift out to sea and get lost.
 - d. None of the above

Sea Otters Questions (Cont'd)

6. Full grown sea otters can weigh up to _____ pounds.
7. One amazing thing about otters is that they can
- use tools to hunt.
 - see in the dark.
 - cook their food.
 - breathe under water.
8. Otters carry the food they collect to the surface of the ocean
- in their paws.
 - in their cheeks.
 - in baskets they make out of seaweed.
 - in pouches of skin.
9. Sea otters rest
- alone.
 - on rafts.
 - in groups called rafts.
 - on large rocks along the shore.
10. Otters wrap themselves in sea kelp
- so they won't drift out to sea.
 - to keep warm.
 - because it helps them float.
 - to waterproof their fur.

Name _____



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Sea Otters Answers

1. c
2. b
3. d
4. c
5. b
6. 100
7. a
8. d
9. c
10. a