



### FAST FACTS

**NAME:** Sea otter

**SCIENTIFIC NAME:** *Enhydra lutris*

**AVERAGE WEIGHT:** 32 to 41 kg (male), 18 to 27 kg (female)

**AVERAGE HEIGHT:** 1.4 m

**AVERAGE LIFESPAN:** 15 to 20 years

#### **DID YOU KNOW?**

Sea otter fur has about 1.6 to 2.6 million hairs per square cm, the thickest fur of any animal in the world.

### PHYSIOLOGY

Sea otters have small front legs and stiff toes for handling food, while strong back legs with webbed feet allow for graceful paddling through the water. Because the mismatch gives them a clumsy walk on land, sea otters rarely stray too far from the sea.

Unlike some marine mammals, sea otters rely on thick fur instead of blubber to keep warm in the icy waters of the Pacific Ocean. A thick layer of underfur covered by black, pale brown or silver guard hairs traps air for insulation.

Older sea otters sometimes get silvery heads as their guard hairs change colour. Along with its long, stiff whiskers it's no wonder the otter has earned the nickname "Old Man of the Sea."

### HABITAT/BEHAVIOUR

Sea otters are hungry animals. In a normal day they'll eat one quarter of their body weight by feasting on sea urchins, crabs, clams, mussels and octopuses. To get food, a sea otter may hammer open shellfish with small rocks or dive over 100 metres into the murky ocean depths. When it has something to eat, an otter rolls onto its back in the water and places the food on its chest to savor bite by bite.

A good part of a sea otter's day is spent cleaning itself, because matted or clogged fur doesn't trap enough heat. Some scientists worry that a big oil spill could wipe out all of Canada's sea otters because the oil would get stuck in their fur and cause them to freeze to death.

### RANGE

Hundreds of thousands of sea otters used to live on the Pacific coast between northern Mexico to Alaska. But the fur trade, which began in the 1700s, almost wiped out all of them. The last sea otter in B.C. was shot near Kyuquot on the west coast of Vancouver Island in 1929.

Eighty-nine sea otters were slowly reintroduced to B.C. between 1969 and 1972 and now there are around 2500 living off Vancouver Island and off the B.C. coast near Goose Island.