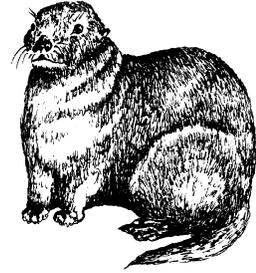




## SEA OTTERS

### LOOK BUT DON'T TOUCH



It is illegal under the Marine Mammal Protection Act to touch a marine mammal without proper authorization\* . This protects both you and the animal. Contact with a sea otter, even in an attempt to help it, may place both the rescuer and the animal at greater risk than non-contact would have.

Sea otters:

- are powerful animals that can inflict serious injuries if they become alarmed or are incorrectly handled.
- may carry diseases that are harmful to people and domestic animals
- are susceptible to diseases carried by humans and domestic animals, including pets
- are highly adapted to their environment and can generally survive better there than in captivity.

Many veterinarians will not accept sea otters into their clinics because of the potential for transmittal of diseases to their domestic patients.

Most attempts to rescue sea otters by untrained personnel end in death or injury to the animal and often result in injury to the would-be rescuer. You and the animal will usually both be better off if you seek help from a trained wildlife professional.

If you have concerns about marine mammals not under the authority of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service such as whales, seals, and sea lions, please contact National Marine Fisheries Service (1-206-526-6733).

The following guide provides information on how to respond to the stranding of a dead or live sea otter in Washington.

### **What to do if you find a LIVE sea otter in distress?**

#### DO NOT APPROACH OR PICK UP THE ANIMAL.

*Please be aware that sea otters can carry diseases that are transmissible to humans and pets and should be approached and handled with caution.*

If you see a sea otter you believe is in distress or out of its natural habitat and want to help, you should contact the Sea Otter Stranding Network at **1-877-326-8837 (1-87-SEA-OTTER)**. If possible, post someone to keep dogs, people, and other animals away. Please be prepared to provide the following information to the Stranding Network:

---

\* Animals can only be picked up by an authorized individual. If a biologist from the Stranding Network is not available to respond to the scene then, as a last resort, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service can verbally authorize someone to pick the animal up. However, this would be a one-time authorization on a case-by-case basis.

- What is the geographic location of the animal (give detailed directions, i.e., by a certain boat ramp/road/trail/GPS location)?
- Where is the animal (beach/water)?
- How long has it been there?
- Have you been watching it the whole time?
- How near were you when you were observing it?
- How big is it? (size can indicate age of animal)
- Are there any obvious signs of injury? Open wounds, gunshots? Is it in obvious distress?
- Are there any other animals in the area?
- Have any other animals been near it?
- General description of the situation – are there people and dogs harassing it?
- Do you have photos of the animal and its location?
- If the sea otter is tagged on either or both of its rear flippers, please record the color combination, flipper (right and/or left), and numbers.

## **What to do if you find a DEAD sea otter**

***Please be aware that sea otters can carry diseases that are transmissible to humans and pets and should be approached and handled with caution.***

If you find a sea otter carcass, please contact the Sea Otter Stranding Network at **1-877-326-8837 (1-87-SEA-OTTER)**. Please be prepared to provide the same type of information as requested for a live stranded animal (see above).

The carcass of a freshly dead sea otter can provide important information to help biologists understand their natural history and physiology. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife are especially interested in obtaining sea otters that have recently died.

The carcass is less than 24 hours old if:

- There are no maggots or fly eggs on or under the body
- There is no foul odor or dark brown/ black fluid emanating from body
- The eyes are present and not wrinkled or shrunken
- The animal was observed alive within the last 12 hours, i.e., not observed dead for more than 12 hours.
- The body is intact and not scavenged
- The fur does not pull free in clumps when grasped

If you find a dead sea otter that meets these criteria, please give us a call and we will try to recover the carcass. Do not disturb the carcass until you have contacted the Stranding Network. However, if the tides, other animals or people may disturb the carcass, please secure it. Be prepared to give the exact location of the carcass and take photographs if possible.

Your help can provide wildlife professionals with valuable information about sea otter range, locations, mortality numbers and sources, presence of diseases, and many other relevant factors.