

Alaska Crime Scene Investigations



"Sam" the sea otter - Alice Cove Research Team;
image taken under Letter of Confirmation No.
MA-043219 from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Profile: Sam, the Sea Otter

Real (scientific) name: *Enhydra lutris*

Alias: Native name "old man of the sea" (Old otters develop white fur around the head and neck.)

Missing: Sea otters in Southcentral Alaska have declined for unknown reasons. Sea otters are one piece in the Alaska ecosystem food web puzzle. Declines in one part of the food web can affect other animals, as their lives and habitats are interconnected. Sea otters can become entangled in commercial fishing nets.

Distribution: California, Washington to Alaska, not present in Oregon

Location: Anywhere, Alaska

Status: Protected under the U.S. Marine Mammal Protection Act

Weight: Pups: about 2 kg (a little less than a pound or a bag of sugar)
Adult Males: up to about 45kg (roughly 100 pounds)
Adult Females: up to 33 kg (roughly 73 pounds)

Length: Adult Males: up to 148 cm (roughly 4 feet 10 inches)
Adult Females: up to 140 cm (roughly 4 foot 6 inches)

Color: Dark brown to reddish brown

Identifying features: The otter has the densest fur of any mammal, over 100,000 hairs per square centimeter. (Humans have around 100,000 hairs on their whole head.) Otters have a loose flap of skin under their forelimbs for storing food and often use rocks to break open shellfish.

Prior Criminal Record: Can compete with humans in fisheries, for example for abalones

Evidence: Entanglement in fishing nets and in crab pots.

Eats: Eats in shallow bottom waters such as kelp beds: abalones, urchins, rock crabs, squid, octopus, and slow moving bottom fish.

Average Life Expectancy: Males: 10 or 15 years
Females: 15 to 20 years

Known predators: Orca, Man, Sharks