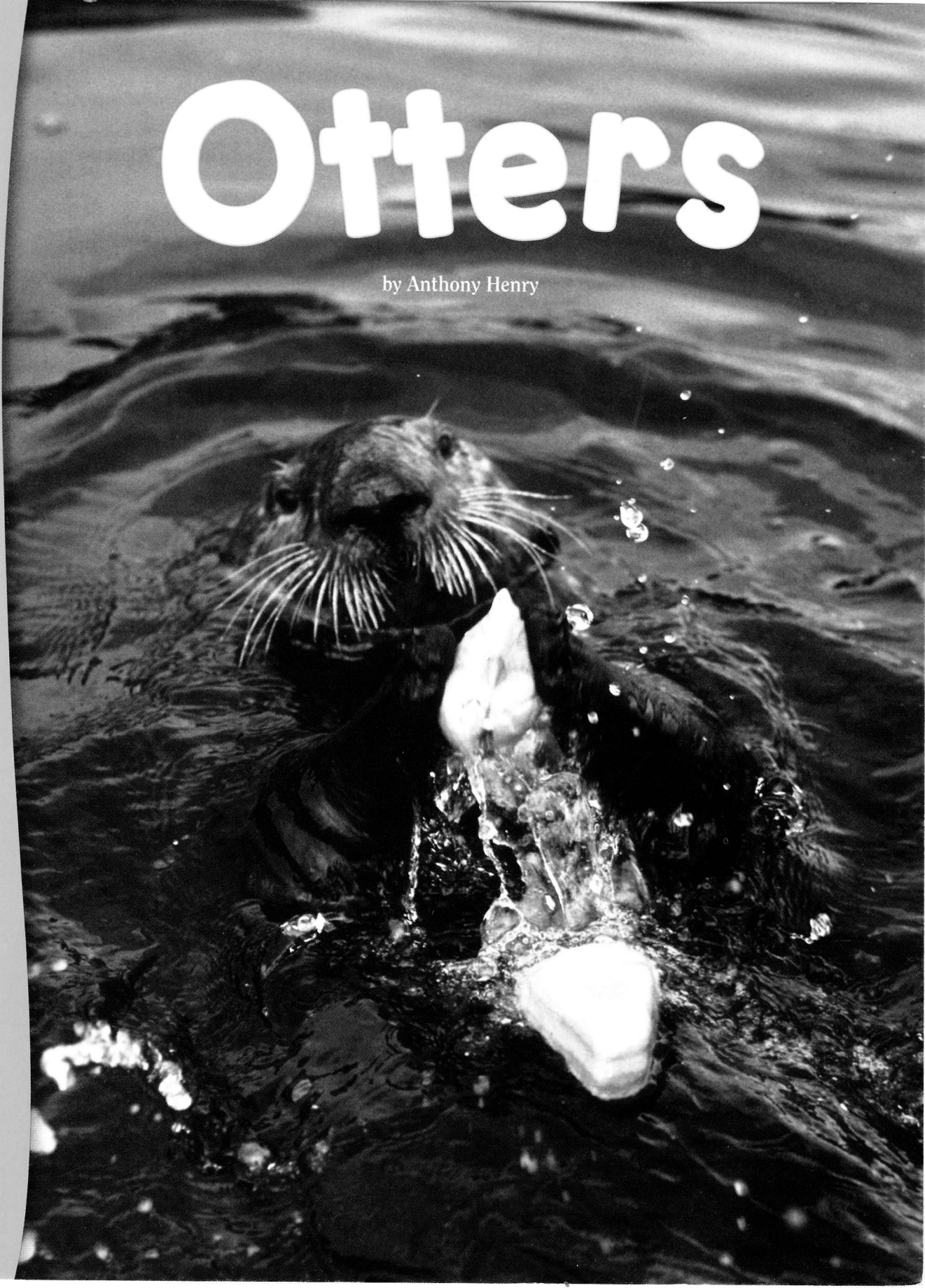


# Otters

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- 1 Sea otters are tough little animals. For two hundred years, they were hunted without mercy by fur traders. They were hunted almost to extinction. The fur traders killed the otters so they could sell their thick, soft fur for as much as two thousand dollars a pelt.
- 2 It is now against the law to kill sea otters. In 1977, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service placed the sea otter on the Endangered Species list. They are now protected by state and federal laws.
- 3 Sea otters are found off the western coast of the United States. They live among the kelp beds. Kelp is seaweed and is a good place for otters to hide. Their dark heads look a lot like fat kelp bulbs. Kelp bulbs are the balloon-like knobs that keep the kelp afloat.
- 4 Sea otters sleep, eat, and care for their young at sea. They live in groups called rafts and try to stay together.
- 5 The sea otter floats on its back when it sleeps. To keep from floating away from the raft, it wraps several strands of kelp around its body. Then, it ties these strands to the sea otter next to it.
- 6 The sea otter doesn't just sleep on its back. It also eats that way. It uses its furry chest as a dining room table.
- 7 The sea otter's favorite kind of food is shellfish. It also likes crab, lobster, and starfish.
- 8 It has a very clever method of cracking the shells of shellfish. First, it dives to the ocean bottom and picks up a rock. Next, it rises to the surface and flips over on its back. Then, it pounds the shellfish with the rock until the shell cracks. Finally, still floating on its back, it pops the meat from the cracked shellfish into its mouth.
- 9 When the sea otter finishes its dinner, it cleans up its dining room table. It simply rolls over in the water and swishes the crumbs from its chest.
- 10 The sea otter is a member of the weasel family. The male is about four feet long and can weigh anywhere from forty-five to one hundred pounds. He has a blunt, whiskered face, which makes him look like a wise old man. Plus he has big, webbed hind feet, which allow him to swim as fast as ten miles an hour.
- 11 The female sea otter looks much like the male, but she is a bit smaller. She is loving and kind to her babies, and she cuddles them fondly while she floats on her back. She takes care of them until they're almost grown.
- 12 The killing of these clever, gentle animals for their valuable fur began in 1727. At that time, a group of hunters killed some sea otters off the coast of Alaska. During the next two hundred years, nearly 360,000 more were killed.
- 13 Before the killings began, there were close to a half million sea otters. They could be found all the way up and down the Pacific coast from Mexico to Alaska.
- 14 Now only about 150,000 sea otters are left. Roughly two thousand live off the coast of California. The rest live off the coast of Alaska.
- 15 It is important that we continue to protect the sea otter. Sea otters are an important species to the ecosystem—they eat the sea urchins that, if left unchecked, can destroy kelp forests. Without the otter we would not only lose kelp forests, but a playful animal as well.

## COMPREHENSION

**A** Choose the best ending for each sentence. Write *a*, *b*, or *c*.

- 1 This story is mainly about
  - a** why sea otters are important to the ecosystem.
  - b** the behavior and habitat of the sea otter.
  - c** Both **a** and **b**
- 2 After reading this story, we can conclude that otters
  - a** are tough yet adaptable animals.
  - b** are friendly to humans.
  - c** can be wonderful pets.
- 3 Sea otters cannot be seen easily in the kelp beds because they
  - a** dive to hide themselves.
  - b** float on their backs.
  - c** blend in with the kelp.

- 4 The otter was placed on the Endangered Species list because
  - a** it was in danger of dying out.
  - b** people cared about the otter.
  - c** Both **a** and **b**
- 5 People paid as much as two thousand dollars for an otter's fur because
  - a** it was rare.
  - b** it was of good quality.
  - c** Both **a** and **b**

## LEARN ABOUT WORDS

**B** Often you can find out the meaning of a word by seeing how it is used in a story. The other words in the story give you clues.

Find the word in the story that best fits each meaning. (A paragraph number tells you where to look.) Write the word.

- 1 skin of a fur-bearing animal (1)
- 2 strings; long, narrow pieces (5)
- 3 way; means (8)
- 4 lovingly (11)
- 5 having a quick mind (12)
- 6 land next to the sea (13)
- 7 all the living and nonliving things in an area, such as soil, water, and insects (15)

**C** A word may have more than one meaning. Its meaning will depend on how it is used.

The *fly* buzzed around the room.  
The bird will *fly* to its nest.

Look at each word in **bold type** below. Note the paragraph number. Look back at the paragraph. Which meaning does the word have there? Write *a* or *b*.

- 8 **beds** (3)
  - a** furniture to sleep or rest on
  - b** patches; places where plants grow
- 9 **pops** (8)
  - a** bursts open
  - b** quickly puts
- 10 **blunt** (10)
  - a** square; not pointed
  - b** direct; gruff

## THINK ABOUT IT

**D** A fact is something that can be proved. It is a true statement. An opinion is what someone thinks. It cannot be proved.

**Fact:** Sea otters have fur.

**Opinion:** Their fur is beautiful.

Read each sentence. If it can be proved, write *Fact*. If it cannot be proved, write *Opinion*.

- 1 Sea otters eat shellfish.
- 2 Sea otters can swim as fast as ten miles an hour.
- 3 The sea otter is very cute.
- 4 The sea otter was placed on the Endangered Species list in 1977.
- 5 Everyone likes sea otters.

**E** One word in the following row doesn't belong with the others.

chickens   ducks   ~~foxes~~

Chickens and ducks are birds. Foxes are not birds. *Foxes* is the word that doesn't belong.

Which word doesn't belong in each row? Write the word.

- |               |         |         |
|---------------|---------|---------|
| 6 crab        | otter   | lobster |
| 7 sea         | ocean   | beach   |
| 8 shell       | pelt    | fur     |
| 9 rafts       | herds   | kelp    |
| 10 forty-five | several | hundred |

**F** Suppose that you are going to write a report called "How a Sea Otter Lives." Read each item. If it fits your main topic, write *Yes*. If it does not, write *No*.

- 11 A sea otter spends its life at sea.
- 12 A male sea otter looks like a wise old man.
- 13 A female sea otter takes care of her babies until they're almost grown.
- 14 A sea otter eats shellfish.
- 15 Laws have been passed to protect sea otters.