



CHAMPIONS
OF THE
WILD

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WILD

SEA OTTERS

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AS SEEN ON
DISCOVERY
AND
ANIMAL
PLANET



VHS
C9198 146

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SEA OTTERS



To watch a sea otter is to watch the key to life itself: endless movement and flux.

These creatures spend their entire lives in the often frigid waters of the ocean, and because they have no insulating blubber, they must spend most of their time eating and preening. Otters eat up to one-third of their body weight every day, their metabolisms working rapidly to generate heat. Meanwhile, their thick rich coats keep the warmth in and the chill out – the constant cleaning provides optimum insulation.

Like so many misunderstood species, sea otters were once hunted relentlessly – partly for their beautiful fur and partly because they were seen as a threat to local fisheries. By 1911, when sea otter hunting was banned, only about 1,000 remained, most of them living off the coast of Alaska.

Instead of saving the fishery, the near-disappearance of the otters spelled disaster. Because they are the sea urchin's only non-human predator, the otters' voracious eating habits had kept the sea urchin population in check. Once the otters were gone, the vegetation-eating urchins multiplied dramatically, leaving a barren underwater landscape.

Sea otters are the only creatures apart from primates to use tools. They will hammer tough shellfish like abalone with rocks to break them open; and sometimes they find a favourite rock to hang onto and use as an opening tool.

Most sea otters still live in Alaska, but with successful translocation programs, sea otter populations are growing dramatically all along the west coast. And with the otters come thick kelp forests filled with fish and shellfish like crabs, abalone and snails.



Champion:
Jane Watson

Champions of the Wild takes you around the globe with stories of remarkable endangered species and the dedicated champions determined to save them. Buy the whole collection!

Pre-Viewing Questions

1. It is illegal to hunt sea otters, and they have few natural predators – yet they face a constant threat from human economic activity. What do you think that threat is?
2. Sea otters were land-based mammals that evolved for life back in the ocean. What types of changes would they have had to make to adapt to this kind of life?
3. Research some similarities and differences between sea otters and river otters.

Post-Viewing Questions

1. Why do otters have to eat so much?
2. Why is a healthy otter population important for the near-shore ecosystem?

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World Wide Web Sites

Please note that addresses on the Web can change unexpectedly.

Excellent information about sea otters from the Vancouver Aquarium:
oceanlink.island.net/seaotter.html

A good article written by Jane Watson and published in the Canadian Wildlife Service's magazine Recover, on the importance of sea otters to ocean ecology:
www2.ec.gc.ca/cws-scf/es/recovery/winter97/eng/9702otter.html

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Who would have thought that those cute little creatures flipping around in the water off North America's west coast are crucial to the region's underwater ecology? As sea otter expert Jane Watson tells us, they don't just live in the ecosystem, they practically run it.

Watson has watched sea otters around Vancouver's Bunsby Islands for years now. She's seen their population spread out along the coast – and she's observed majestic underwater forests of kelp that spring up wherever the otters appear.

Otters were once viewed as a threat to local fisheries, and they were nearly hunted into extinction. But through her research, Watson has shown that lots of healthy otters mean lots of fish and vegetation.

Join Jane Watson as she dives through the deep and learn the mysteries of the only mammal to have re-evolved for life back in the ocean.

Endangered animals – and the champions who have dedicated their lives to saving them – feature in this spectacular series of half-hour videos! Filmed around the world, from the frozen fields of Canada's North to the jungles of Borneo, **Champions of the Wild** combines natural history with personal drama.

Director: **Chris Aikenhead**

Producer: **Christian Bruyère**

Executive Producer: **Michael Chechik**

25 minutes, 30 seconds

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