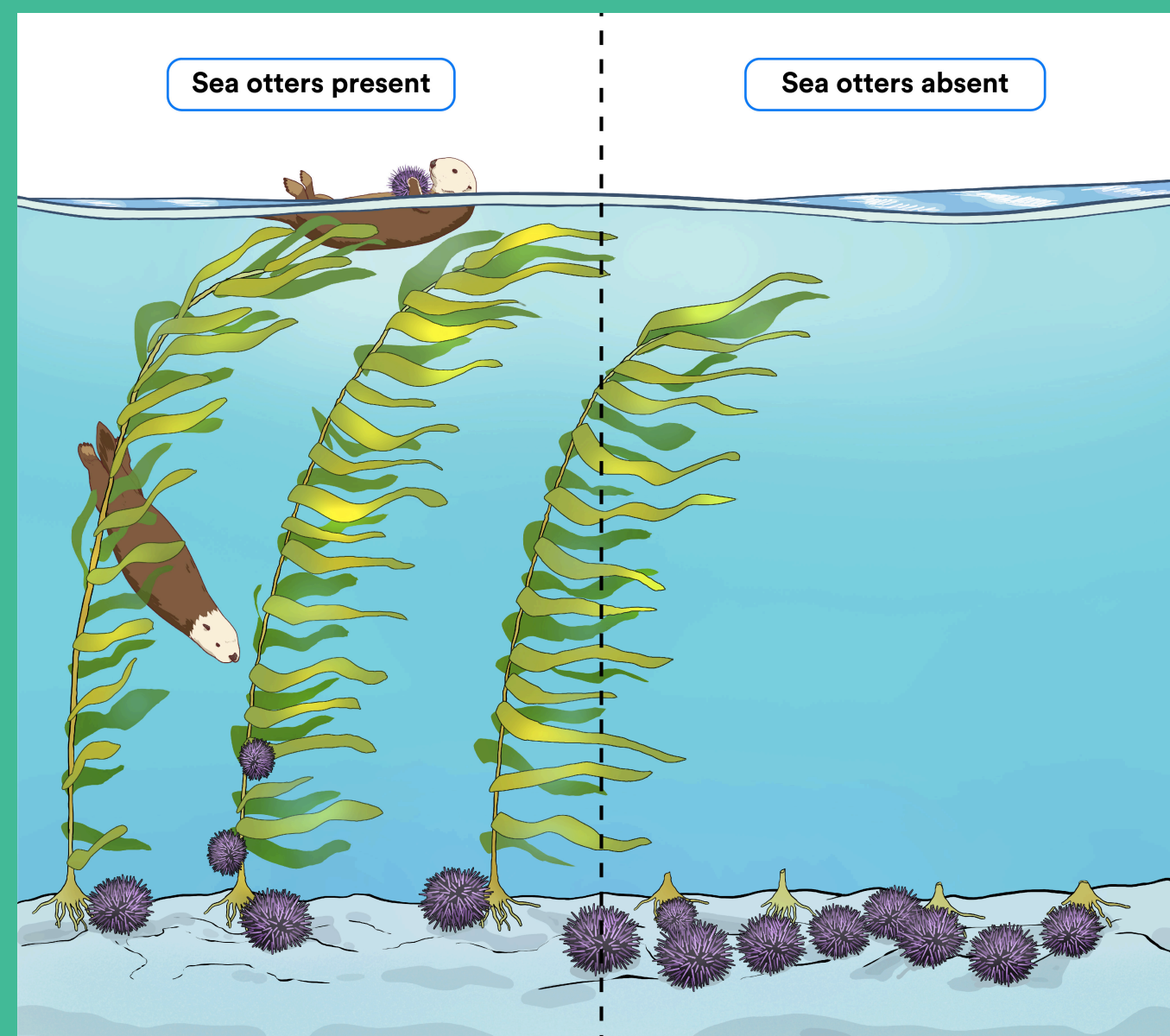


Sea Otter

Enhydra lutris

Ecology



Keystone Species

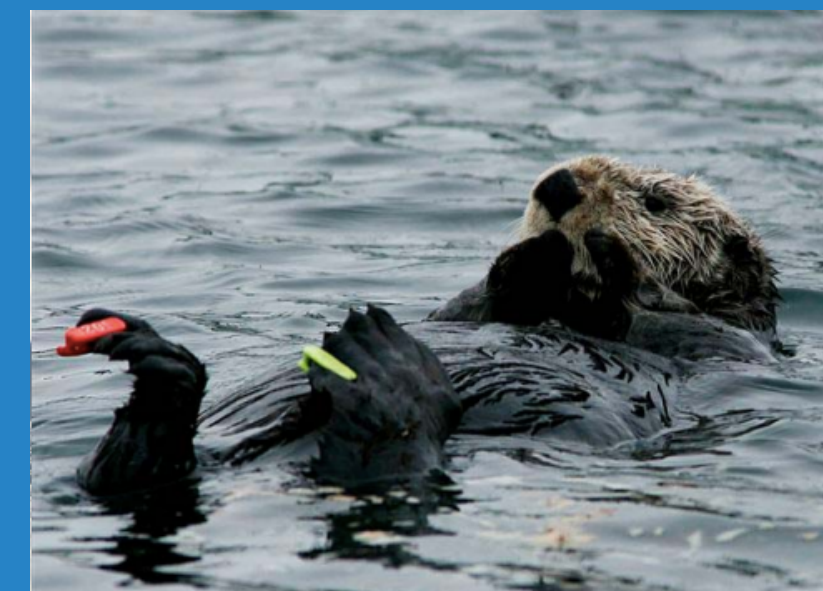
- Kelp forests are an essential part of the intertidal and tidal ecosystems, creating habitat and food sources for many species.
- Left unchecked, sea urchin populations can get so high they devour the kelp, taking away vital habitat for many species.
- Sea otters are one of the major predators of sea urchins. A healthy sea otter population can maintain a lower urchin population which preserves the essential kelp forests and promotes biodiversity.

- Sea otter range expands along much of the coast of the northern Pacific Ocean.
- Historically, their range was much larger than it is today due to overharvesting for their fur from the late 18th to the early 20th century.
- Reintroduction efforts have been successful in some areas in Washington and California.



Current Management

- The US Fish and Wildlife Service is currently responsible for the management of sea otter populations.
- They are protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act.
 - This acts prohibits any direct harvesting of marine mammals with the exception of subsistence hunting.



Staying Warm!

Without blubber, sea otters find other ways to stay warm in their cold marine environment.

Feeding

- Sea otters have a metabolic rate 2-3 times higher than a similar sized terrestrial mammal.
- To maintain this, sea otters consume 20-30% of their body mass per day in food!

Fur

- Sea otters have the densest fur of any animal.
- Up to 1 million hairs per square inch!
- Provides a waterproofing and insulating layer.



Behavior



- Sea otters are known to form large groups called "rafts" for resting and feeding.
- These rafts are generally composed of one sex.



- 100% of the parental care of offspring is carried out by the females.
- Pups stay with their mothers, getting groomed and fed, for around six months.