



# News Release

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **SHEDD AQUARIUM RESCUES SEA OTTER PUP**

*Aquarium's Rescue and Rehabilitation Team Provides Round-the-Clock Care for Pup*

**CHICAGO** – [Shedd Aquarium](http://SheddAquarium.org), a national leader in sea otter rehabilitation, announced today that it has acquired a 10-week-old orphaned southern sea otter pup (*Enhydra lutris nereis*) from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) as part of the conservation effort for the threatened population in California. The female pup, weighing in at 15 lbs., is the first southern sea otter to reside at the aquarium. She will soon join her Alaskan relatives, some of whom have lived at Shedd for decades.

In early December, the pup was found stranded near Cayucos (ky-YOU-cos), Calif. Shedd worked closely with its West Coast sister institution, Monterey Bay Aquarium and its Sea Otter Research and Conservation program staff, to assist with the animal's rescue and stabilization. Due to the significant amount of resources needed to care for a pup, there are only a handful of facilities in the United States equipped with available housing space and the experience needed for appropriate care. Understanding the urgency of the situation and needing immediate action for the pup's survival, Shedd officials and animal care staff quickly made arrangements to provide her with a permanent home.

"Shedd Aquarium is one of the country's top marine mammal conservation and education organizations, so it was only natural that we do whatever it takes to make sure that a pup of a threatened otter population survives," said Jim Robinett, Senior Vice President of Legislative and Regulatory Affairs at Shedd. "Shedd's animal care expertise and world-class facility enabled us to offer her a home and the highest quality care that she needs when all options seemed lost.

"With so few southern sea otters in the wild, it's imperative to learn more about this species in order to protect them," continued Robinett, who is the past president and active board member of the [Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums](http://AllianceofMarineMammalParksandAquariums.org). Robinett also lends his leadership as the chair of the Marine Mammal Taxon Advisory Group (TAG) for the [Association of Zoos and Aquariums](http://AssociationofZoosandAquariums.org) (AZA), a group within the national accreditation association dedicated to the conservation and management of animal populations in zoos and aquariums.

To ensure the pup receives everything that she needs, a rotating schedule of Shedd's animal care experts provides care and attention 24 hours a day, seven days a week. During this intensive nurturing period, the pup will remain behind-the-scenes in the Regenstein Sea Otter Nursery as she learns certain behaviors, such as grooming, foraging, and feeding, as well as regulating her own body temperature by getting in and out of the water.

“Similar to the role of a parent with their own child, raising a sea otter pup is a labor of love. The process requires time and patience, but thankfully, our first-hand experience and history with rehabilitating sea otters prepares us for the road ahead,” said Ken Ramirez, Executive Vice President of Animal Care and Training.

Ramirez said that staff has named the pup Cayucos, after the beach where she was found and rescued, continuing a long Shedd tradition of tying rescued animals’ names to the location where they were found.

“Cayucos is acclimating very well to her new surroundings in Shedd’s pup pool, which was added during the renovation of our Abbott Oceanarium in 2009. She is achieving new milestones every day, including taking formula from a bottle and eating solid foods, such as shrimp and clams. With her progress, we hope to be able to introduce her to the public this summer.”

Fewer than 3,000 members of this species live in the wild today. Southern sea otters were listed as “threatened” under the Endangered Species Act in 1977. The population of southern sea otters fails to grow consistently despite decades of federal and state protection.

“Having her in our care will further what marine mammal scientists know about her threatened wild relatives along the Southern California coastline and contribute valuable insight to ongoing conservation efforts for the entire sea otter population all over the world,” said Ramirez, who is also the past president of the International Marine Animal Trainer’s Association (IMATA) and an involved board member of the Texas Marine Mammal Stranding Network.

With a long history of involvement with marine wildlife rescue projects, Shedd Aquarium is one of the first institutions to conduct training with sea otters to further their survival and care. After the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill in 1989, Shedd participated in the wildlife recovery efforts and took in many orphaned pups. The aquarium is now recognized as an expert in rehabilitating sea otter pups. Nearly all of the sea otters residing in the Abbott Oceanarium at Shedd were rescued pups. Shedd also participated in recovery efforts to rescue sea turtles in the Gulf oil spill in 2010.

### **Editor’s Note**

Video and photos of the sea otter pup behind-the-scenes at Shedd Aquarium are available for download at:

**Link:** <https://backup.filesanywhere.com/fs/v.aspx?v=8b726b895c6276b6a4ad>

**Password:** otter

### **About Sea Otters**

As the smallest marine mammal, sea otters are members of the weasel or mustelid family. Adult females can weigh between 35-60 pounds; males reach up to 90 pounds. Instead of blubber to keep them warm, they have very thick hair that consists of two layers: an undercoat and longer guard hairs. The otter’s fur is important to their survival, so they spend up to four hours a day grooming. If they do not keep their coat immaculate, they risk getting cold and dying of hypothermia.

Pups stay with their mothers until they are eight months old. Otters do not mate for life, but form a bond that lasts for three or four days. After mating, the male leaves the female and is not involved in raising the pup. Sea otters must eat at least 25 percent of their body weight each day to maintain a high metabolic rate, which keeps their internal body temperature at 100°F. They eat bottom-dwelling nearshore animals, such as abalone, clams, sea urchins, crabs and octopus.

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*Shedd Aquarium is supported by the people of Chicago and the State of Illinois.  
Shedd Aquarium is an accredited member of the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) and the  
Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums*

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