

For Creative Minds

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Marine Mammals

a mammal . . .

- is an animal
- has a backbone
- breathes oxygen from the air
- is warm-blooded
- has hair
- feeds milk to its young

Most mammals (but not all!) give birth to live young.

Not all animals with backbones are mammals, but all mammals have backbones.

Can you think of any animals with backbones that are *not* mammals?

There are many animals that share some traits of a mammal. But only a mammal has *all* of these traits.

Are you a mammal?

Are you a *marine* mammal?

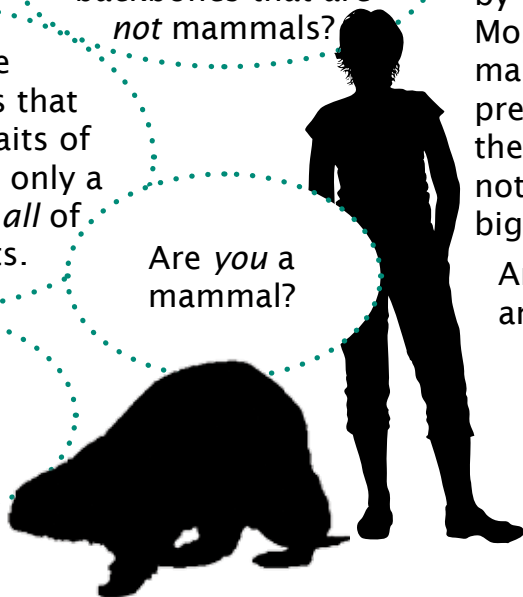
A **marine mammal** is a mammal that is adapted to spend all or most of its life in the ocean. There are more than a hundred different species of marine mammals! Seals, sea lions, whales, dolphins, porpoises, manatees, dugongs, sea otters, walruses, and polar bears are some of the different types of marine mammals.

Sea otters live in the northern Pacific Ocean. They spend almost their entire lives in the water, but sometimes come onto land to rest, groom, or nurse their young.

The water is very cold, so sea otters need a way to stay warm. Most marine mammals have a thick layer of fat, called blubber, that helps keep their body warm. But not sea otters! Instead they have thick fur. Sea otters have the densest fur of any mammal.

Sea otters are smaller than humans, but not by much! Adult sea otters are 3-5 feet long. Most humans are about 5-6 feet tall. But by marine mammal standards, sea otters are pretty puny. The largest marine mammal is the blue whale. At almost 100 feet long, it's not just the biggest marine mammal, it's the biggest living animal in the world!

Are you taller than a sea otter is long? Are any sea otters longer than you?



Sea Otters and You



sea otter	human
mammal	mammal
chews food	chews food
eats food with paws	eats food with hands
uses tools	uses tools
has two paws and two flippers	has two hands and two feet
lives in water	lives on land
has hair	has hair
torpedo-shaped body for swimming	upright body for walking on two feet
has a skin pocket under their arms to hold rocks or carry food	wears clothes with pockets to carry things
grooms hair	grooms hair
has whiskers	sometimes has whiskers

Otters use teeth called “molars” to chew. Molars are large teeth with a flat surface.



Open your mouth and say “Aaahhh!” Are there any molars in your mouth?



Otters’ whiskers sense vibrations to help them hunt.

Otters have 170,000 to 1 million hairs per square inch on their bodies. Humans have only about 100,000 hairs on their whole bodies!

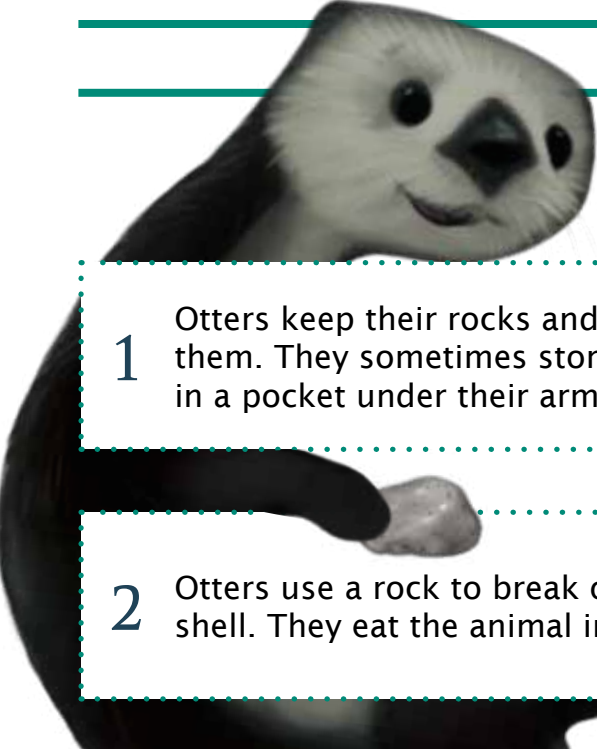
one square inch

All that hair needs a lot of attention. Otters spend 2-3 hours each day grooming their hair. How much time do you spend taking care of your hair?

Some people have whiskers. On humans, we usually call them beards or mustaches.

Sea Otter Tools

Sea otters use tools in many ways! People use tools too. Does Oliver use tools the way an otter does? Match the sea otter's skill to Oliver's.



1 Otters keep their rocks and reuse them. They sometimes store rocks in a pocket under their arms.

2 Otters use a rock to break open a shell. They eat the animal inside.

3 Otters have to be patient. It takes many repeated blows with a rock to open a mussel.

4 Otters can use a broken shell as a lever to pry food off a rock.

5 Otters learn to use tools from the otters around them, usually their moms.

6 Otters move rocks aside to look for food behind them.

A Oliver learns to use tools from his mom and dad.

B Oliver moves the pantry door to look for food behind it.

C Oliver keeps his tools and reuses them. He stores his tool box in the garage.

D Oliver uses a nutcracker to break open a walnut's shell. He eats the nut inside.

E Oliver has to be patient. It takes many repeated swings with a hammer to drive in a nail.

F Oliver uses a screwdriver as a lever to pry the lid off a paint can.

Sea Otters and River Otters

Sea Otters . . .

- weigh 50-100 pounds
- have thick, brown fur. The fur on their heads and paws gets lighter as they get older
- have a flattened tail, less than a third of their body length
- live in salt water along rocky coastlines, often in kelp forests
- float on their backs
- grab food with flexible paws
- eat food on their chests as they float
- sleep wrapped in kelp
- have just one pup at a time
- eat mostly urchins, crabs, clams, mussels, snails and octopuses
- gather together to make a group of otters called a raft



- are a type of weasel
- have long torpedo-shaped bodies
- are meat-eaters (carnivores)
- have webbed feet for swimming
- have claws
- have two layers of fur to keep warm

River Otters . . .

- weigh 20-25 pounds
- have fur that can be grey and white to brown and black
- have a rounded tail, more than half their body length
- live in wetlands and estuaries
- swim on their bellies
- catch prey with their paws and mouth
- eat food on land
- sleep in underground dens
- have two or three pups at a time—or sometimes as many as six!
- eat fish, frogs, crayfish, insects, rats, and birds

