

U. S. MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION

Southern Sea Otter

Distribution

Historically, sea otters occurred in coastal waters throughout the rim of the North Pacific Ocean from northern Japan to Baja California, Mexico, with southern sea otters ranging from Oregon to Baja California. Following almost two centuries of commercial hunting, sea otter populations were severely reduced; surviving southern sea otters consisted of a small colony of otters along the remote Big Sur coast of central California. Between 1911, when hunting was prohibited, and 1972, when the MMPA was passed, these otters recolonized more than 200 miles (370 kilometers) of the California coast. Today, southern sea otters occupy approximately 13% of their historic range; their current distribution extends along the central California coast from Monterey Bay to Point Conception. Mortality from shark attacks of otters has been more frequent at the northern and southern extremes of population's range and may be a factor in preventing or slowing range expansion of the population into seemingly suitable habitats.