



Otters make comeback

The success of a five-year-old international operation to re-establish sea otter populations on the west coast of Vancouver Island was recently confirmed for the first time.

Scientists from the Pacific Biological Station at Nanaimo reported sighting several thriving colonies of the animals in the general area where sea otters from Alaska were released in 1969, 1970, and 1972. The transplant involved scientists and technicians from federal fisheries, B.C. Fish and Wildlife, and Alaska Fish and Wildlife.

During the recent sighting female sea otters were observed with young, which scientists say indicates strongly that the transplant has taken. Sea otters were captured near Amchitka Island in Alaska for the transplant and were shipped to Bunsby Island aboard a federal research vessel, the G.B. Reed.

The former abundance of the sea otter, which possesses perhaps the most valuable coat of any furbearer, declined drastically in the 19th Century as a result of commercial harvesting. By the early 1900s, only a handful of the animals remained. The last native sea otter was seen on the west coast in 1929. The transplanted sea otter population is fully protected under provincial fish and wildlife legislation.

Sea otters feed on a variety of mollusks, sea urchins and kelp, but variations in their diet depend upon the greatest concentration of individual foods. Sea otters are not particularly fast swimmers. Fish are not considered to be a part of their diet. Abalone, sea urchins and sea mussels appear to constitute their principle food.

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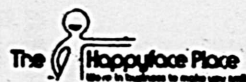
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