



## NEWS

# The Incredible Shrinking of the Sea Otters Study shows alarming decrease in population

By [JESSICA GREENE](#)

Updated 11:15 AM PDT, Wed, Jul 1, 2009



Getty Images

Scientists puzzled by increasing mortality rates in sea otter populations along California's central coast say the animals' food source may be delivering deadly pathogens.

The cute critters familiar to anyone who visits the [California](#) coastline are disappearing at an alarming rate, a [U.S Geological Society](#) study found.

Southern sea otters are a common sight in the ocean waters from [Monterey](#) south to Big Sur but the endangered mammal has a long way to go before it can be removed from the threatened species list. The [USGS study released Tuesday](#) says the latest numbers show the population of sea otters is shrinking faster than any time since the late 1990s. The past three years saw the most shrinkage in sea otter numbers.

"This year's census results demonstrate that sea otters continue to experience levels of mortality sufficient to limit their recovery" said Dr. Tim Tinker, lead scientist for the [USGS](#) sea otter research program in California.

But there's hope for future sea otter generations.

"This slight dip of the sea otter growth trend has happened before, most recently in the mid- to late 1990s, so hopefully this will be just a brief set-back to the recovery of the population." USGS biologist and survey

organizer [Brian Hatfield](#) said. "The fact that the pup counts have continued to increase slowly is encouraging."

**Related Stories**

---