

Sea Otter Veterinarian

Mike Murray, DVM - Monterey Bay Aquarium



What do you do?

I am the staff veterinarian for the Monterey Bay Aquarium. I provide routine health care for exhibit sea otters and am on-call for emergency coverage for the sea otter stranding program, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. I also provide support for medical and surgical activities for a variety of researchers working with marine mammals.

What education and skills do you need?

I have a degree from an undergraduate program, followed by 4 years of veterinary school to obtain my Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) degree.

Curriculum areas needed for your job?

My studies had a heavy emphasis on sciences, medicine, biology, mathematics, public speaking, writing, and lots and lots and lots of reading.

Can you tell us your key work experiences?

I worked in the US Army Veterinary Corps, at a private dog/cat practice, and a private zoo and exotic animal practice.

What personal skills are needed for your job?

You need patience, persistence, good communication skills, confidence, and curiosity.

What do you enjoy the most about your job?

The best aspects are the animals that I have the opportunity to work with. The staff at the aquarium is consistently world-class, and their input is tremendously important. The overall work within a scientific and conservation-based institution provides tremendous job satisfaction on a daily basis.

What do you like least about your job?

The worst part is the down side to managing stranded animals. You can't save them all and many die despite your best efforts.

How did you decide to work with sea otters?

Nothing specific led me towards sea otters. They are part of my overall responsibility for the health of

the Monterey Bay Aquarium animals. Now that I have the chance to work with them, I find them to be critically important aspects of the nearshore ecosystem.

Why is your job important?

The veterinarian brings an entirely different set of skills to the management of captive animals. In the sea otter specific sense, many of the procedures utilized, such as surgery, require the training that veterinarians have received.

What are the most important subjects to study if someone is interested in your profession?

To me, the most important aspects are reading and math. Medicine, including veterinary medicine, requires lots of reading and all science is essentially based upon mathematics. So, developing a science interest and emphasizing math and reading are critically important for this field.

Do you have any favorite web links to learn more about sea otters?

Montereybayaquarium.org