

## **"The Unusual Behavior of These Strange Animals..."** **-- Dr. Edna M. Fisher**

Excerpted from *The Otter Raft*, Summer 1988

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One of the first scientists to extensively study the newly-discovered sea otter colony off the Bixby Creek Bridge was Dr. Edna M. Fisher of the University of California, Berkeley. In her paper entitled, "Habits of the Southern Sea Otter," published in the February 14, 1939 issue of the *Journal of Mammalogy* (vol. 20, No. 1, pages 21-36), she described the activities of the otters in detail, noting that, "the unusual behavior of these strange animals immediately caused much excitement among the local residents." The drawings below illustrated the article, capturing on paper for perhaps the first time many of the antics that legions of otter admirers have now come to know by heart.

"The most common resting position is with the head up and the chin resting on the chest; the small paws or hands folded across the chest."

"Often they place their paws over their eyes so that they can sleep during the daylight."

"Asleep, all four feet help up in air as if wired in place."

"The otter rolls over and over ... without touching the head, arms, legs or tail to water -- they do this frequently and with the greatest ease; so smoothly is it accomplished that it has been impossible to figure out just how it's done."

"The parts that require the most (grooming) attention are the head, the arms, the entire ventral surface and the legs and especially the big webbed feet."

"It is not an uncommon thing to hear a sharp clicking sound ... this sound is always made by an otter that is trying to crack something open ... the object is held with both paws and with full arm action from well over the head it is brought down hard on a piece of rock that rests on the otter's chest ... this clicking sound is so distinct that it can be heard for some distance above the noise of the waves."

"Frequently a gull is seen riding the waves close to the feasting otter, waiting to pick up any morsels that may be dropped."

"The habit of wrapping up in kelp prevents the otter from drifting away ... during the night."

"On guard, two otters rise up to look around and sniff the air for danger."

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