

## Injured Sea Otter?



Restin' up

Rod Palm

It's 10:00ish on Oct. 15 when Steve Lawson and partner Susan Hare pull up alongside my window, "Hey Rod, there is a Sea Otter alongside Kevin Bond's float who may be injured" – "Thanks much, I'm on it". There's the *Waxnii* (Otter), all wrapped up in the kelp alongside Kevin's float and yes, there is a toony-sized open sore on a knuckle of his awkwardly postured right hind flipper. What's most curious here is that despite the fact that I've cautiously approached to within about 10 feet there has been no sign of a flight response. OK, I'm going to tie my boat up to the float and try for a closer inspection. That done, I slowly wander over to within about 4 feet of him and sit down on an old crab crate... "Well now, are you ok? That looks like a nasty owie you have there, get hit by a boat, get it caught in a crab trap or something? When I have a skinned knuckle, I hold it up just like you're doing. I'm guessing you're a male as you don't have any tell-tale scarring on your nose from being held during mating. From the way you're slapping your tail around, you don't have a spinal injury and, no offense but, you do look a little chunky so you have been eating well enough". Our conversation goes on for over an hour; he is a very good listener. "Right - now here's the thing, we need to decide if your injury warrants me scooping you up for shipment to the Vancouver Aquarium or would you rather skip the trauma involved and let your own metabolism deal with it?...Long silence then he twists around and grabs yet another stalk of Bull Kelp to wrap over himself. "Ya, I think you're right, I'll check back in a few hours to see how you're doing".

Three hours later and the Buckle boys see that he's gone; they spot him casually swimming West past Strawberry Island.

We have a suspicion that this may be the same otter who has been spotted on multiple occasions in the sheltered waters of the Tofino-Opitsaht-Browning Passage areas and just last week, Marcel Theriault (whale-watch driver/guide for Jamie's Whaling Station) reported a very approachable otter near Vargas Island with an injured foot. This injury may be what has influenced him to frequent our sheltered inlets where the environment is not so physically demanding as his normal habitat in the exposed open ocean.

3 days later in Duffin Cove, Tofino visitor Kyle Tiessen reported seeing an approachable Otter with an open sore on his right foot and the next day, "Hymax" Greg sees him eating a couple of crabs at Marina West right here in Tofino Harbour.

**Well, that settles that. The powers that be received other calls on our “otter of concern” and opted to recover the animal yesterday so he is now being pampered and well looked after at the Vancouver Aquarium.**

**So many questions; we hope to learn how old he is, is the foot broken, any other trauma, how is his weight, etc.**

**Many sources have been calling in reports, on this one foot injured Sea Otter, hanging out in the inlet, that actually goes back several months. It’s assumed that he has been surviving on a River Otter diet (mostly Red Rock Crabs and Staghorn Sculpins in this area) but perhaps not doing all that well.**

**Will keep you posted as we learn more...Rod**

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