

Name \_\_\_\_\_



## The Role of Otters in the Ecosystem

Otters may be small, but they play an important role in keeping their ecosystems healthy. As predators, otters help control populations of other animals, maintain balance in their habitats, and protect the plants and animals around them.

### Controlling Populations

Otters are carnivores, which means they eat meat. They hunt for fish, crabs, sea urchins, and other aquatic animals. By eating these creatures, otters prevent their populations from growing too large. For example, sea otters help control the population of sea urchins, which eat kelp. If there are too many sea urchins, they can destroy entire kelp forests. By eating sea urchins, sea otters allow kelp forests to thrive. These kelp forests are not only home to many fish and other animals, but they also help reduce carbon dioxide in the ocean, which improves the health of the planet.

### Helping the Food Chain

Otters are a key part of the food chain. They eat smaller animals, but they are also prey for larger animals like sharks, orcas, and eagles. This makes them an important link in the chain, helping energy flow through the ecosystem. When otters are healthy and active, their presence helps maintain this delicate balance.

### Improving Water Quality

By hunting and eating fish, otters also help improve the water quality in rivers, lakes, and oceans. For example, river otters eat sick or weak fish, which can reduce the spread of disease in the water. This helps other fish and aquatic animals stay healthy.

### Protecting Their Habitat

Otters are known as “indicator species.” This means that the health of otters can show how healthy their environment is. When otters are thriving, it’s a sign that the water and surrounding area are clean and full of life. However, if otters are struggling, it might mean that pollution or other problems are harming the ecosystem.

Otters contribute to their environment in many ways, from controlling pests to protecting plants. By understanding their role, we can see how important it is to protect these incredible animals and their habitats.

