

National Wildlife Federation
National Wildlife Week 1981, "We Care About Oceans"
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WE CARE ABOUT OCEANS

Kelp Habitat Theme Excerpt

NARRATION FOR SLIDES

12. One of the most important things we've learned in our studies of oceans is that all marine life is linked: all the plants and the animals and the water itself. When any part of the sea's natural pattern of life changes or is changed by man, other changes take place. This drawing shows life in a Pacific coast kelp forest, the habitat, or home, of many plants and animals that depend on each other for shelter and food.

Drawing by Kimberly Kerin.

13. As you can see by following the arrows on this chart, the sea otter is one link in a food chain. Spine-covered sea urchins (#4) feed on seaweed, or kelp plants (#2). The sea otter (#1) eats sea urchins and other small animals. In turn, the sea otter might be the prey of a killer whale (#9). This kelp forest food chain is just one part of what we call the food web of the oceans.

Drawing by Kimberly Kerin.

14. Now, if sea otters disappeared from the kelp forest, what would happen? There'd be so many sea urchins eating the kelp that this underwater forest home of hundreds of animals might be destroyed.

Photo by Howard Hall/Tom Stack & Assoc.

15. That very thing almost happened nearly a century ago. Thousands of sea otters were killed for their beautiful and valuable fur. Just in time, laws were made to protect the few sea otters that still lived along the shores between California and Alaska. In the past 70 years, sea otters have made a fine comeback, and they're once again thriving in forests of strong, healthy kelp.

Photo by Tom Myers.

16. The kelp forest provides shelter and plenty of food for this rockfish and these purple and red sea urchins, just two of the many kinds of wildlife found here.

Photo by Robert Evans/Tom Stack & Assoc.

17. When the sea otter eats sea urchins, it floats on its back. Sometimes it wraps kelp strands around its body to keep from drifting away. This sea otter may look relaxed, but it is always on the lookout for enemies. . .

Photo by Jeff Foott.

18. . . . especially if Orca, the killer whale, is lurking nearby. This fierce predator has a strong jaw and a fearsome set of teeth that interlock when it snatches its prey.

Photo by Norman Owen Tomalin/Bruce Coleman, Inc.

19. This diver, deep in a kelp forest, harvests abalone, a good-tasting shellfish that also is valued for the pearly lining of its shell. Sea otters also collect abalone to eat. Some abalone divers and other shell fishermen think sea otters take too many shellfish, and that raises a question: How can a natural balance be kept in this kelp forest, so a fair share of food goes to all creatures--including people?

Photo by Howard Hall.