

Northern sea otter pup rescued in Alaska finds new home at Shedd Aquarium

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In late October 2023, a young sea otter pup was found in the remote coastal town of Seldovia, Alaska, stranded and calling out in distress with no mother in sight. After being rehabilitated, fed and healed, the

tiny otter—barely over a month old—began a cross-country trip to his new home in Chicago.

After being rescued by the Alaska SeaLife Center, the 10-pound male northern sea [otter](#) received a warm welcome at Shedd Aquarium in late November. He has remained behind the scenes at the [aquarium](#), where animal care and veterinary staff are monitoring and caring for him around the clock.

The newcomer will eventually join the five southern [sea otters](#) at Shedd—Luna, Cooper, Watson, Suri and Willow—who are also rescues. Temporarily referred to as Pup EL2306, he has been forming bonds with staff and reaching development milestones at the otter nursery before he can meet his peers and experience his new habitat at Shedd.

Stranded sea otter pups require constant care. Aquarium staff feeds the new pup every three hours with formula in a bottle and small pieces of clam; they also groom him with soft towels and engage him with enrichment activities.

In a news release, Shedd Aquarium said not many facilities in the United States have the space, staff and experience necessary to provide rescued otter pups with the care they require. Only 11 institutions, including Shedd, provide homes for sea otters that cannot be rereleased.

Because sea otter pups depend heavily on their mothers for the first year of their lives, the federal government usually designates orphaned northern sea otter pups as non-releasable if they are found stranded when young.

"At Shedd, we are dedicated to the care of animals here, there and everywhere; we stand ready to assist in times of need," said Peggy Sloan, chief animal conservation officer at the aquarium. "With this newest

addition to our rescued population of sea otters, we're committed to his long-term care and continuing to create connections for Chicagoans to this important keystone species."

As keystone species, sea otters help maintain the balance of their ecosystems. For instance, they keep [kelp forests](#) healthy by eating sea urchins that graze on giant kelp; if otters disappeared, urchins would decimate kelp which many other species depend on for food and shelter.

Northern sea otters are found in the Aleutian Islands, southern Alaska, British Columbia, Washington, California and as far as Japan. According to Shedd Aquarium, sea otter populations in south-central and southeast Alaska have stabilized or are increasing.

But the last two decades have seen a decline of northern sea otter populations in southwest Alaska. Under the Endangered Species Act, they are considered "threatened." According to Shedd, this is due to predation, overharvest, fishery interactions, disease and oil spills.

The sea otter species as a whole is listed as "endangered" on the Red List of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. Commercial fishing and [industrial pollution](#), as well as rising ocean temperatures due to climate change, are some of the ways in which human activities particularly endanger the species.

Shedd will continue sharing updates on the pup's development, when he can be expected to join the sea otter habitat, and plans around naming him. Last year, the aquarium let the public vote on Willow's name.

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