

MONTEREY BAY

A HISTORY OF CONSERVATION

The greatest national marine sanctuary of the U.S. provides opportunities to observe dozens of species of cetaceans, seabirds and the only colony of southern sea otters 100 kilometer south of San Francisco, in California, the Monterey Bay is an exemplary case of conservation.

BY
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With more than 150,000 follicles per centimeter, there is no animal in the world with a greater concentration of hair than the sea otter. At least not one that we are aware of. Unlike other mammals adapted to life in the ocean, sea otters lack the coat colloquially known as whale blubber.

If the otter survives in the cold waters of the North Pacific, it is because of its dense coat. Sadly, it is also because of this coat that the species was hunted until local extinction. At the top of the 20th century, with the exception of Alaska, the sea otter had been erased from the United States. Or at least, that's what was believed. It was the construction of a bridge in Big Sur, south of Monterey, which heralded the discovery of a colony. Moved to the Monterey Bay, these otters became the banner of the conservation movement--not just its subspecies, known as the southern sea otter, but of the marine ecosystem.

Thanks to the efforts of organizations such as Sierra Club and the Monterey Bay Aquarium, the Monterey Bay was declared a national marine sanctuary in 1992. Today it is a protected natural area cohabited by dozens of marine species.

And there is no need for miracles, a trip to Monterey's parks, estuaries and waters is usually enough to see whales, birds, seals, sea lions and otters.

LIFE IN KELP FORESTS

Off Cannery Row, in the heart of Monterey, otter sightings are not uncommon thanks to the kelp forests, large algae that grow in shallow waters.

The bay's coastal promenades and piers are ideal to observe both mammals and seabirds.

To see groups of otters from the water, sharing their habitat with seals and sea lions, a kayak is ideal. Of course, it is important to remember that sea otters are a protected species

and they can easily become stressed. In order to not alter their behavior, and in accordance with the law, kayakers must stay at least 18 meters away from otters.



WHALE WATCHING IN THE BAY

While sea otters have become the representative species of the marine sanctuary, in the waters of the Monterey Bay there are more than 35 species of mammals recorded. Thanks to the presence of an underwater canyon, deep and rich in food, Monterey can see both deep-sea and deep-sea cetaceans.

Self-proclaimed as the whale watching capital of the world, Monterey does justice to its title with whale activity present year-round.

In the warmer months, particularly in August, there are frequent sightings of blue and humpback whales. In the colder months, encounters with grey whales are common.

With a bit of luck, orcas, dolphins, porpoises are added to the list and even beaked whales, cetaceans capable of holding their breath underwater for more than an hour.

BIRDING IN ESTUARIES, BEACHES AND SWAMPS

North of Monterey, an estuary flows into the bay and presents itself as an alternative for observing birds and marine mammals. Located in Moss Landing, in the center of the bay, Elkhorn Slough is a swamp famous for its waters in which seals, otters and sea lions coexist with crabs, leopard sharks and endemic salamanders.

Electric catamarans, stand-up paddle boards, and kayaks

also coexist in the canals of Elkhorn Slough. Listed as a

Ramsar site, this wetland of international importance shelters

more than 340 species of birds. The list includes the Grey Plover, the American avocet, the cinnamon woodpecker and three species of cormorants.

Near the quagmire, the Salinas River national wildlife sanctuary offers additional trails and several miles of pristine beach for bird watching.

