

How Sea Otters are Saving Coastal Ecosystems

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Sea Otters

- **Sea otters** were extensively hunted in the **18th and 19th centuries** for their **thick, soft fur**.
- Declared a **fully protected mammal** in California in **1913**, but populations faced challenges from **oil spills** and habitat loss.
- Their numbers rebounded after being listed as **threatened and federally protected** in **1977**.

Contribution to Limiting Green Crabs:

- Sea otters consume **50,000 to 120,000 green crabs annually**, effectively controlling their population. This marks a significant solution to the invasive species problem on the **West Coast of the United States**.
- **Unique adaptations:** Unlike other marine mammals, sea otters rely on a **high metabolism** rather than blubber to stay warm in cold oceans. They consume about **25% of their body weight daily**, making them **voracious predators**.

Green Crab (*Portunus Sanguinolentus*)

- The green crab is a **common littoral crab**, recognized globally by names such as **shore crab** or **green shore crab** in the British Isles. It is one of the top 100 “**world’s worst alien invasive species**”, showcasing its **invasive nature**.
 - **Habitat:** Native to the **Atlantic Ocean** and **Baltic Sea**, but now spread to **Australia, South America**, and **South Africa**.
 - **Physical Features:**
 - At maturity, the **carapace width** measures about **90 mm**.
 - Colouration varies between **green, brown, grey, and red**, with delayed moulting causing red colouration.
 - **Red crabs** are more aggressive compared to others.
 - **Diet:** Feeds on **small crustaceans, molluscs, and worms**.
 - **Impact on Ecosystems:** The **green crab’s invasive behaviour** harms coastal ecosystems by:
 - **Damaging seagrass beds**, critical habitats for various marine species.
 - **Overhunting prey species**, crucial for the survival of other native species.
 - **Outcompeting native species** for resources like food and habitat.
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Q1. What is a horseshoe crab?

A horseshoe crab is a marine arthropod known for its hard exoskeleton and horseshoe-shaped shell. Despite its name, it is more closely related to spiders and scorpions than crabs, dating back over 450 million years.

Source: IE

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