

## Fabio's Story and Flippertags

From Bob Mannix



This is a series of photos of Fabio, aka George at SORAC (Sea Otter Research And Conservation) at the Monterey Bay Aquarium. He is a long time study animal for the Sea Otter Program headed up by the USGS, Tim Tinker and Jim Estes, senior scientists on the program. The pink and light purple tags on his rear flippers can be seen if you look closely in several of the photos. Fabio also has a radio transmitter that was surgically implanted into his abdominal cavity. This allows observers to identify the azimuth to his location so a spotting scope can be used to observe his behavior from a remote location.

A note on flipper tags. Otters have 5 digits on each appendage. On the rear flippers, digit one is analogous to our big toe and digit five is analogous to our pinkie toe. Each flipper get a colored tag with tags placed in the webbing between either digits one and two or four and five. By the color of the tags and location on the flipper, observers can make a positive id with a spotting scope when observing a tagged otter.

Fabio was recaptured early this June for a medical examination. Fish and Game does the capture and then delivers the otters to the Aquarium where vet, Mike Murray, is in charge of the medical procedures.

Fabio was aged at about 12 years. Most of his lower teeth were gone then with one lower incisor remaining on his right side. You can see from one of my attached photos that teeth in his upper jaw are well worn also. Sadly, Fabio is close to the end of his life span and he will have to deal with the effects of El Nino this winter and spring.