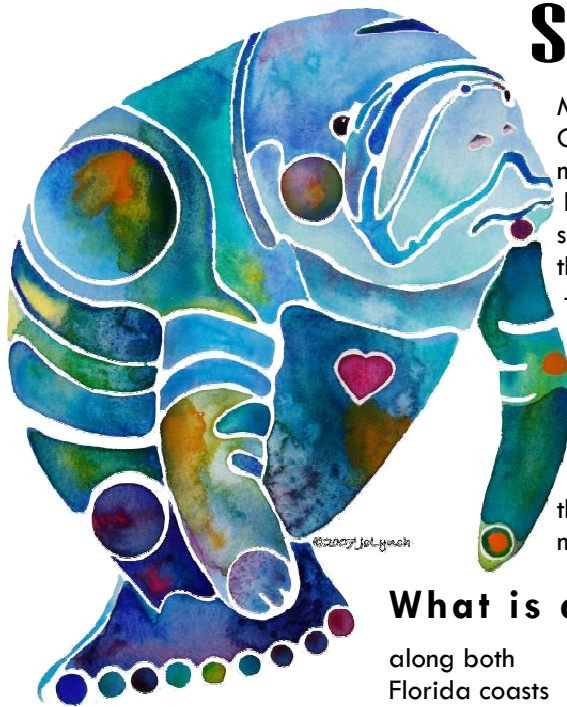


Marine Education Poster Contest 2012

Sponsored by Dolphin Encounters & Vendors of Nassau

Dolphin Encounters-Project BEACH

Contest Deadline: April 30th, 2012



Save The Manatees!

Manatees are members of the Order Sirenia, from the ancient mythology term "siren." For hundreds of years, many a sailor thought that mermaids—the beautiful sirens of the sea—would lure sailors onto treacherous, shallow reefs with their melodious singing. The "mermaids" may have just been whistling manatees!

These gentle giants are the only vegetarian marine mammals in the sea.

As tame and slow creatures, manatees are easy prey for hunters and often victims of pollution and speeding boat traffic.

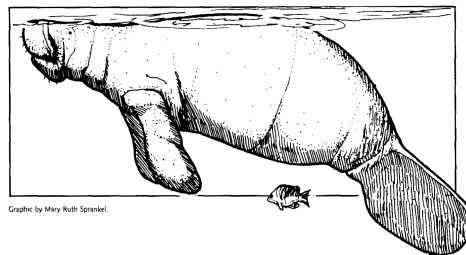
Though they are now protected by law, manatees are **endangered** today and need our help to survive in the wild. Let's take a closer look at these marvelous cows of the sea!



There are three species of manatees: West Indian, Amazon and African. The **West Indian Manatee** is found along the Florida coast, sparsely through the Bahamas and Caribbean and also along Central and South American coasts.

What is a Manatee?

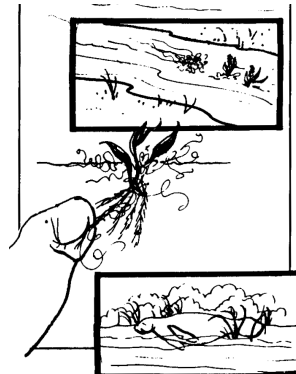
along both Florida coasts and a small number in the Bahamas. They can be found swimming in salt, fresh or brackish waters.



Manatees are large grey marine mammals with flat paddle-shaped tails. On their robust body they have two front flippers with 3-4 nails on each. They use their **flippers** for steering, crawling and putting things in their mouths.

On average manatees will grow up to 10 feet in length and weigh on average between 800 to 1,200 pounds. Some manatees have even weighed up to 3,500 pounds and can even live up to 60 years old!

Nicknamed sea cows these gentle giants are passive, slow movers. They communicate with chirps and whistles. As **herbivores** they like to feed on marine, estuary and freshwater plants.



Trichechus Trivia!



- Can be "aged" by counting the number of annual growth rings in its ear bones
- Feed, rest or travel any time of day or night
- Cannot turn its head sideways so it must turn its whole body around
- Know when cold weather is coming and seek warm water areas
- Eat about 100-150 pounds of floating and underwater plants each and every day!
- Sometimes groan when they stretch
- Commonly fart (gas!)



Of the WI Manatees there are two sub-species: Florida and Antillean. The **Florida Manatee** (*Trichechus manatus latirostris*) is commonly seen

Manatees Need a Healthy Habitat

A **healthy habitat** for manatees must have four basic elements: food, water, space & shelter.

Food: Because manatees eat so much food, they must have a habitat that has an abundance of aquatic plants to support manatees using the area.

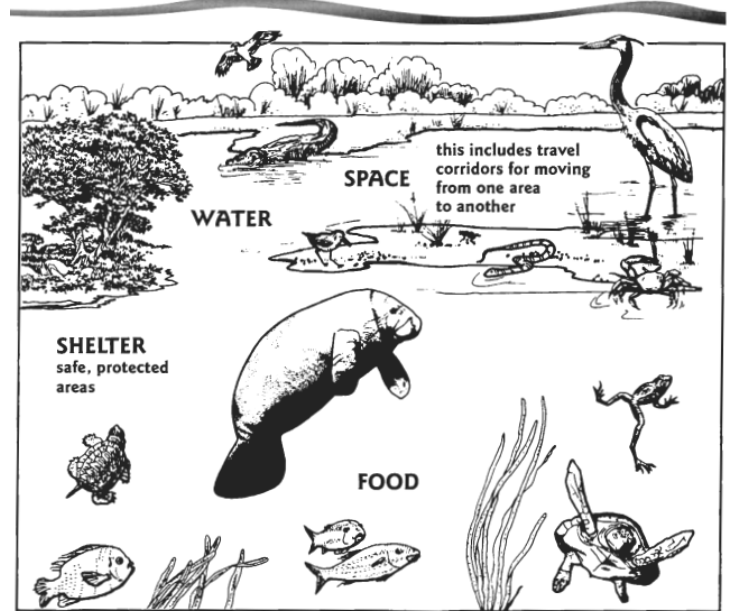
Fresh Water: Like other marine mammals, manatees get their water from the food they eat. They can live in marine habitats for long periods of time without access to fresh water. They can also drink fresh water.

Space: Manatees require space to move about. They are **migratory**, moving each season based on a variety of factors. Travel corridors are necessary for manatees to move back and forth

between summer and winter habitats or between areas for feeding, resting or calving. Most manatees prefer to return to the same habitats each year.

Shelter: Manatees need safe, warm, protected areas away from boat traffic, harassment and strong currents. Shelter continues to be harder and harder for manatees to find. As a result, manatees live in less healthy habitats with high boat traffic that often result in serious injury or death.

Manatees can easily get sick in cold temperatures so they generally like water that is above 70° F. In winter they are commonly found near natural fresh water springs or water effluents from power plants in Florida.



Sharing Space

Manatees share their marine habitat with many living things, such as tarpons, sea turtles, pelicans, sharks, rays, snapper and oysters. Manatees also live in freshwater habitats so you may find them with river otters, bass, frogs, snails and insects. Some animals that live in both their habitats include ospreys, herons, egrets and snakes.

Manatees Need Our Protection!

Manatees are **endangered** because there are too few and changes threaten their habitats. Without protection, they will become **extinct**. Conservation action can help save the manatee!

Watercraft Collisions

Because manatees are slow-moving, need to surface to breathe air and like shallow water, they are vulnerable to collisions with boats. They are hurt by either the

boat hull or the propellers. Boaters can help by:

- Respecting no-boating in manatee sanctuaries
- Staying in deep water channels when boating
- Reducing to trolling speed in shallow waters
- Not operating jet skis near manatee areas

Harassment

Any act that causes manatees to change their natural behavior is called **harassment**, such as touching, feeding, watering or chasing. Harassment is serious because it teaches the animal to make poor

choices, such as leaving a warm water refuge, stopping normal eating or swimming into dangerous areas. You can help by:

- Not feeding or watering manatees
- Always stay an observer at 50 feet or more

Water Pollution

Water **pollution** can be caused by many items we use daily like pesticides, detergents and petroleum products. You can help by:

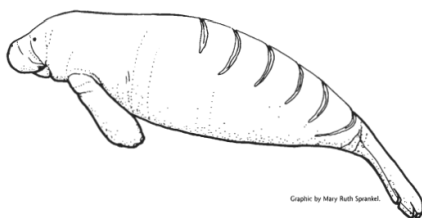
- Never pour pesticides, gas, oil or diesel on the ground or down a drain
- Using biodegradable products when possible



Marine Debris

Trash that has made its way to the sea is **marine debris**. Whether an animal ingests it or gets entangled in it, marine debris can be deadly. You can help by:

- When boating, stash your trash, fishing line & hooks
- On land, get your trash into a proper trash can
- **Reduce** your trash
- **Recycle** the items you can
- Join a beach clean up!



Graphic by Mary Ruth Spensley