



Photo © Patrick M. Rose

If you see an injured, dead, tagged or orphaned manatee, or if you see a manatee being harassed, please call 1-888-404-FWCC (3922), #FWC or *FWC on your cellular phone, or use **VHF Channel 16** on your marine radio.



Save the Manatee® Club

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Florida Manatee Fast Facts

Kingdom: *Animalia*
Phylum: *Chordata*
Class: *Mammalia*
Order: *Sirenia*
Family: *Trichechidae*
Genus: *Trichechus*
Species: *Manatus*
Subspecies: *Latirostris*

Description: West Indian manatees are large, gray aquatic mammals with whale-like bodies that taper to a flat, paddle-shaped tail. They have two forelimbs, called flippers, with three to four nails. Their head and face are wrinkled with whiskers on the snout.

Size: The average adult manatee is about three meters (9.8 feet) long and weighs between 362 – 544 kilograms (800 – 1,200 pounds).

Behavior: Manatees are passive, slow-moving animals. Most of their time is spent eating, resting and traveling. Manatees are often shy and reclusive.

Sight: Manatees can distinguish between different-sized objects, colors and patterns and have been known to respond to visual cues from distances of up to 35 meters (115 feet) away.

Hearing: Anatomically, manatees have large ear bones and have a good sense of hearing. However, their optimal hearing is most likely in the higher frequency range. Sound localization is poor.

Communication: Manatees make sounds that can be described as chirps, whistles or squeaks. Most communication appears to be between mothers and calves.

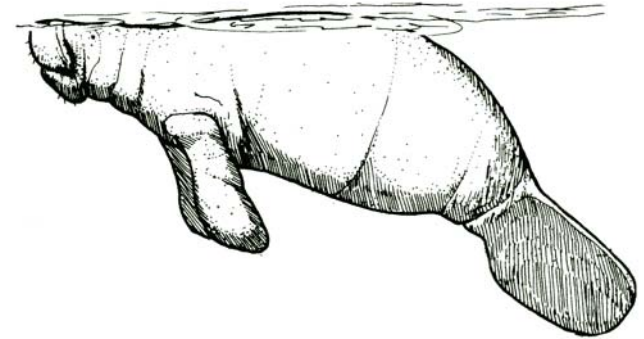
Habitat: Manatees are found in shallow, slow-moving rivers, estuaries, saltwater bays, canals and coastal areas, particularly where seagrass beds or freshwater vegetation flourish.

Range: West Indian manatees are found throughout the wider Caribbean basin and within the southeastern United States. Florida manatees are concentrated in Florida in the winter. Sporadic summer sightings in Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina are relatively common.

Food: Manatees are herbivores. They eat aquatic plants and can consume about 10 – 15% of their body weight in vegetation daily.

Related Species: The West Indian manatee belongs to the scientific order Sirenia and the Florida manatee is a subspecies of the West Indian manatee. Other sirenians include the Amazonian manatee, dugong, Steller's sea cow (extinct), and West African manatee.

Reproduction: As with most large mammals, manatees have a low reproductive rate. Manatees are not sexually mature until they are about five years old. On average, one calf is born every two to five years, and twins are rare.



Mortality: Many manatee mortalities are human-related. Most human-related manatee mortalities in Florida are caused by watercraft collisions. Manatees are also crushed and/or drowned in canal locks and flood control structures. They can accidentally ingest fishhooks, litter and fishing line or become entangled in crab trap lines. Manatees can also die from natural causes such as cold-related disease, gastrointestinal disease and pneumonia.

Legal Protection: Manatees in Florida are protected under two federal laws: the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 and the Endangered Species Act of 1973. Manatees are also protected by the Florida Manatee Sanctuary Act of 1978.

Conservation: The *Florida Manatee Recovery Plan* is coordinated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and sets forth a list of tasks geared toward recovering manatees from their current endangered status. These tasks include: the development of site-specific boat speed zones for manatee protection, implementation of management plans, posting of regulatory speed signs, levying fines for excessive speed in designated areas, public acquisition of critical habitat, creation of sanctuaries, manatee research, and education and public awareness programs.