

Manatee Facts

Common name: West Indian manatee
Scientific name: *Trichechus manatus*

Appearance: Manatees are large, gentle, slow moving mammals. They range in color from gray to brown. The average adult manatee is about 10-feet-long and weighs between 1,500 and 2,200 pounds.

Ancestry: Manatees and their closet relative, the dugong, are in the Order Sirenia. Their ancestors evolved from four-footed land mammals more than 60-million-years-ago. They are more distantly related to elephants and hyraxes. There are two families and five living species of Sirenians.

Range: Manatees can be found in the South-eastern United States, the Caribbean Islands, Eastern Mexico, Central America and in the northern coast and rivers of South America. They are entirely aquatic.

Habitat: Manatees live in shallow, fresh, brackish and marine aquatic habitats. They cannot survive for extended periods in water cooler than 63 degrees Fahrenheit. They prefer waters warmer than 68 degrees Fahrenheit.

Diet: Manatees are herbivores and eat a wide variety of aquatic plants including seagrass, water hyacinths and shoreline vegetation.

Young: Newborns range in size from 4 to 4.5 feet in length and weigh about 60 pounds.

Growth: Life expectancy of manatees is 60 years.

Reproduction: Manatees are able to reproduce at about 4 to 5 years of age. The gestation period is 11 to 13 months; twin births occur occasionally. Nursing takes place underwater and the calves are dependent on their mother for up to 2 years.

Status: Manatees are federally listed as an Endangered Species.

Major Threats: The major threats to manatee survival are human activities: boat-related injuries and deaths, habitat loss or degradation, and in some countries, hunting.

How to Help: Please be aware of your surroundings while boating and always drive slowly in manatee areas. Do not pollute the manatees habitat.

USGS Research: USGS works in partnership with other Federal and State agencies and private organizations to study manatee life history, behavior, ecology and population biology. This information is vital to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Navy, the National Park Service, the Marine Mammal Commission, and Florida and Georgia natural resource managers for the successful implementation and assessment of Florida manatee population recovery plans. USGS utilizes satellite telemetry and global positioning system technology, a photo CD-based catalog of individual manatees identified by their unique scars, genetic analysis and microbiology to study: movement patterns, reproduction and survival, population trends and structure and the diets of manatees in high-use habitats.

