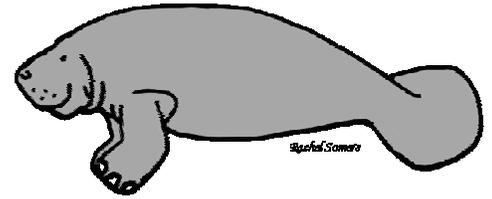


# Manatee Fact Sheet



## Description

Manatees are a marine mammal of the order Sirenia, derived from the Latin word siren or mermaid. Many people believe that sailors mistook manatees for the mythological mermaid. There are several species in the order Sirenia the species native to the United States is a West Indian manatee specifically the Florida manatee subspecies *Trichechus manatus latirostris*.

Manatees have a body form similar to a seal, but they are much larger weighing up to 3,500 lbs, and reaching 13 ft in length. Manatee can live to be 50 years old. The average manatee is 10 ft long and weighs roughly 1000 lbs. Females are usually larger than males. The skin of a manatee is very similar to an elephant from the sparsely distributed hair over the body to the color, gray to gray brown. Manatees have a circular fluke (tail), an oblong shaped body, and two flippers each with 3 to 4 nails. The head of a manatee has small sunken in eyes, large nostrils that can open and close, and whiskers around its mouth similar to a walrus. The lips of a manatee are truncated allowing the manatee to use its lips to grab food and bring it into its mouth; similar to the way an elephant uses its trunk. The manatees' teeth are quite interesting, when a molar falls out the teeth move forward like a conveyer belt with new teeth in the back of the mouth, this is called rolling eruptions.

## Related Species

The other West Indian Manatee subspecies is the Antillean Manatee (*Trichechus manatus manatus*) located in the Caribbean Sea. There are two other species of manatees in the world. The Amazonian Manatee (*Trichechus inunguis*) located in the fresh waters of the Amazon River, differs from the West Indian species because it does not have nails on its flippers and has smooth skin. The West African manatee (*Trichechus senegalensis*) is found along the West African coast, it is similar in appearance to the West Indian species but little is known about it.

The Dugong (*Dugong dugon*) is very similar in shape and size to the manatee except that it has a forked fluke, smooth skin, and no nails on its flippers, and is known to travel further out to sea than the manatee. The dugong is located in the Indo-Pacific region. The extinct sirenian species is the Stellar's sea cow. It was twice the size of a manatee, had a forked tail, toothless, and textured skin. Stellar's sea cow was located in the Bering Strait feeding on phytoplankton. It was discovered in 1741 and in 27 years man for its meat hunted it to extinction.

## Range and Habitat

Manatees can be found in salt to fresh water. Where you find a manatee truly depends on if there is enough food, water, space and shelter. Manatees eat a considerable amount of food each day so they need to be in an area where there is a large amount of aquatic vegetation. Manatees are found in water

that is 68° F or warmer. Water temperatures under 68° F cause manatees to become more susceptible to obtaining cold related diseases. Because of habitat constraints manatees in the US are mostly found in Florida, though they will migrate as far west as Texas and as far North as the Carolinas. One manatee named Chessie has traveled from Florida all the way to New England and back several times. To find out more about Chessie go to <http://www.savethemanatee.org/chessie.html>.

### **Food**

Manatees are the only marine mammals that are herbivorous (plant eaters). They are opportunistic feeders and will eat just about any plant that is soft enough to be torn by their upper lip. Manatees are known to eat over 60 different species of plants, and will also eat some of the small marine invertebrates attached to the plant. Some of their favorites grasses are shoal grass, manatee grass, and turtle grass.

### **Behavior**

Manatees are considered very docile creatures and do not have a true predator except for humans. Manatees spend 6 to 8 hrs a day in shallow water grazing grass beds consuming roughly 100 lbs of food each day which equals 4 to 9% of body weight. Manatees will rest for 2 to 12 hours per day. They can hold their breath for up to 20 minutes and have been known to sprint for short distances at 15 mph. Manatees will communicate through sound, sight, taste, and touch. Manatees can hear very well even though they do not have external ear lobes.

### **Reproduction and Breeding**

- Females give birth around 6 to 10 years old
- Gestation is 12 to 13 months
- Birthing intervals are 2 to 5 yrs
- Calf weighs 66lbs and is 4 to 4.5 ft long

### **Threats**

While grazing in shallow clam waters, many manatees have met their death by accidents with motorboats causing cuts by the propeller and trauma by the impact from the hull of a boat.

Manatees are endangered species because of their high mortality rate, mainly due to human actions, also because their habitat is being lost, and because of their low reproductive rate.