

# Manatees

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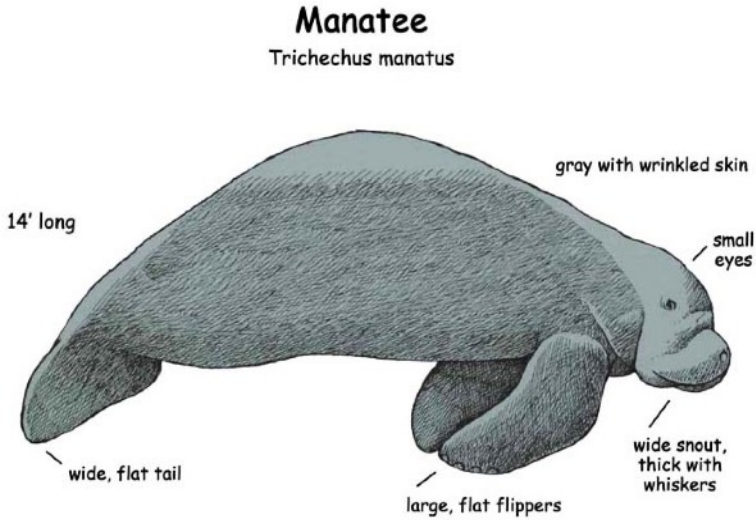


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# Species

## What is a Manatee?



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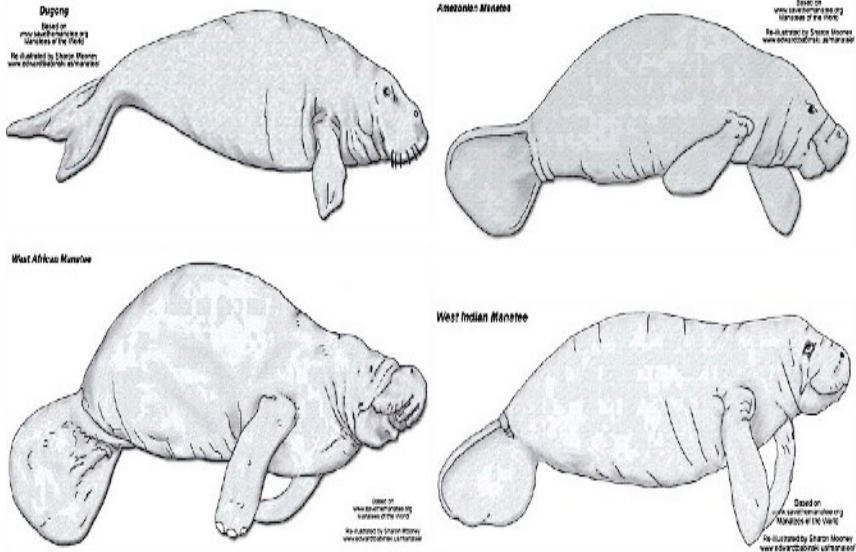
[www.exploringnature.org](http://www.exploringnature.org)

A manatee is a large marine animal, also known as the Sea Cow, with an egg-shaped head, flippers and a flat tail.

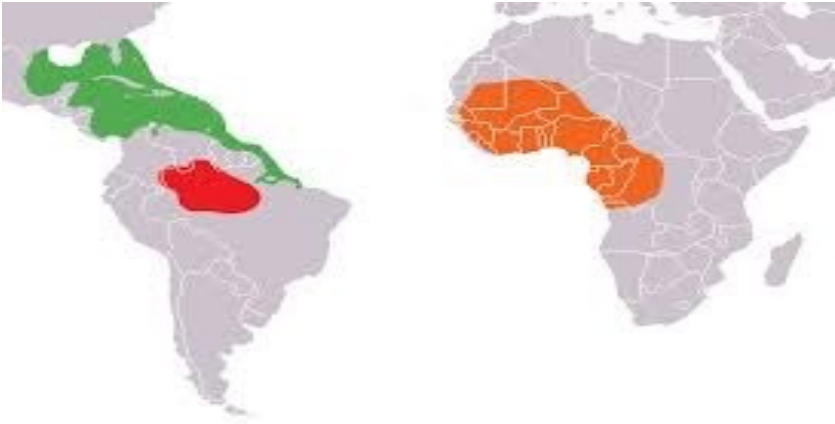
Manatees only have six neck vertebrae compared to humans, whales, and giraffes who

have seven neck vertebrae.

Manatees are usually grey in color and have sparse hairs with bristles around the muzzle.



There are three species of manatees. Each species gets their name from where they are located.



The *Amazonian manatee* is a freshwater species that is located in the water around South America and the Amazon River Basin.



The *West Indian manatee* is located along the southeastern United States, the Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico, and Central and South America.



The *West African manatee* is located off the coast of western Africa in both saltwater and freshwater.



## Habitat

Manatees can be found everywhere that seagrass beds or freshwater vegetation grows, which are in shallow, slow-moving rivers, **estuaries**, saltwater bays, canals, and coastal areas.

The West Indian and West African Manatees spend their lives in salt and fresh warm water (60 degrees or warmer). In colder months, they find their way to warm rivers or warm water outputs from power plants.

The Amazonian Manatee lives entirely in freshwater rivers in South America in the Amazon Basin.

## **Life Cycle**

### Manatee Families

A Female manatee is called a Cow and a male manatee is called a Bull.

Manatees are mammals, meaning female manatees have one live calf every 2-5 years rather than hatching their young from an egg.



The calf stays with the mother for two years and nurses, but starts nibbling on plants at only a few weeks old.

The calf is born underwater, so the mother must help their calf to the surface of the water so the calf can take their first breath. Within the first hour of life, the calf will be able to swim on its own.

When the calf is five years old, it is now an adult and can now have its own calves.

An average manatee lives to be around 40 years old.



## Characteristics

What size are Manatees?

The size of a full grown manatee can range anywhere from 6 feet to 13 feet long. That's the size of 1-2 human adults.

## How much do they weigh?

When a Manatee is born they can weigh 60-70 pounds and are about 4 feet long. An average manatee when full grown weighs 800-1,200 pounds.



## Do manatees swim in a school?

Manatees are usually seen swimming alone. Some can be seen in pairs, or in small groups of a half dozen or fewer animals. A group of manatees together when sharing food or as a mating herd is called a manatee aggregation.

# What Do Manatees Eat?

Adult manatees are **herbivores**.

	Yes	No
Algae	X	
Fish		X
Water Lettuce	X	
Hydrilla	X	
Grass	X	
Jelly Fish		X
Acorns	X	

\*A manatee can eat 150 pounds of food in just 24 hours.

## How do Manatees breathe?

From the water's surface you can only see the manatee's nose and nostrils. Manatees never leave the water, but come up to the surface to breathe air. A resting manatee can remain **submerged** for up to 15 minutes, but if the manatee is swimming it must surface every 3-4 minutes.



# Fun Facts!

An interesting fact about manatees is that they can swim up to 20 miles in an hour in short bursts, but on a normal day they swim only 3-4 miles in an hour.

A manatee has many stages of losing and getting new teeth. A manatee can't turn their head, causing them to have to turn their whole body to look around.

Manatees can learn basic tasks, and are sensitive to touch and can tell the difference in colors.

Manatees' brains are smooth and the ratio of their brain to their body size is the lowest of any animal. Manatees evolved from the same land animals as elephants over 50 million years ago.

# Dangers

Manatees move slowly, making **predators** want their hides, oils, and bones.

In the last 100 years the amount of Manatees decreased, making them an **endangered** species.

Manatees are often accidentally hit by motorboats in crowded waters or get themselves caught in fishing nets.



## **Glossary**

**Estuaries:** A wide part in the water of a river, where the freshwater and saltwater meets and mixes together.

**Endangered:** Any plant or animal that is in danger of disappearing forever. If a species of animal or plant dies out completely and that species hits zero alive everywhere in the world, that species has become extinct.

**Herbivore:** An animal that only eats plants.

**Submerged:** Covered completely with water.

**Predators:** Lives by preying or attacking and eating other animals.



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## Common Core State Standards

RI.3.1 Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.

RI.3.2 Determine the central message, lesson, or moral and explain how it is conveyed through key details in the text.

RI.3.7 Use information gained from illustrations and the words in a text to demonstrate understanding of the text.

W.3.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

SL.3.4 Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking clearly at an understandable pace.

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