Manatees
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Marine Biology

**Abstract**

In this poster project I will cover the main facts on a very special marine mammal called the manatee. I will include its history, such as how it got its name and where its ancestors thrived, its ideal environment for survival, specific facts about its species, its diet, predators, and dangers, where it can be found, how it communicates, and lastly, how to help protect and conserve this wonderful animal. Throughout my presentation I will include captioned illustrations, graphs with legends, and cited literature that was used in this project.

**History**

Manatees originate from an aquatic family called Trichechidae and genus Trichechus. This group consists mainly of large, herbivorous mammals that inhabit various parts of the world. (Encyclopedia of Mammals) Growing up to thirteen feet in length, they are oftentimes rare among the animal kingdom. (dolphins, whales and humans, show true compassion and gentleness that so happens to have a mythological and historical connotation.)

**Environment/Food**

Manatees most often live in seawater that is abundant with vegetation such as kelp and seaweed, since they are strictly herbivores. They eat over sixty different plant species, including mangrove leaves, algae, and turtle grass. It will often consume about ten percent of its body weight each day. “They have been observed eating aquatic plants, and shore plants, including trees, hanging out over the water. They have been observed drifting in the current, casually snatching and eating plants as the current pushed them along. They chew constantly; the sound of their teeth grinding is audible underwater” (Volusia County Florida). Shallow marshlands are ideal for the Siren family, along with many rivers along the Caribbean, the Gulf of Mexico, around Florida (Crystal River Florida Manatee Expedition), Rhode Island, Mississippi, Tennessee, Guyana, and Cape Cod. “Manatees feeding in seagrass beds either crop the seagrass leaves or dig into the sediment with their flippers to eat the entire plant” (Volusia County Florida).

Manatees prefer warmer water and cannot survive in temperatures lower than sixty eight degrees Fahrenheit. Although manatees have predators such as alligators, sharks, and crocodiles, they are most immediately threatened by human activity most commonly associated with habitat destruction, ship strikes, fishing gear, navigation locks, flood gates, pipes, hunting, (“The thick skin of a manatee could be made into leather goods such as shoes, whips, shields, straps, and more. Manatee fat could be used for cooking or medicine. The bones, such as the ribs, are thick and heavy, making them good for weapons.” (Crystal River Florida Manatee Expedition), and trash.

**Physiology**

The word Manatee, originating from the Latin word manatus, means “breast”, which accounts for why manatees resemble large floating grey boobs. Also called the “sea cow”, manatees spend about half of their day sleeping. They surface for air every twenty minutes while spending the rest of their time grazing on plants and tiny fish such as shrimp. Manatees on average swim up to eight kilometers per hour and show similar learning habits to dolphins. Usually, manatees breed every two years and “gestation lasts about 12 months and 12 to 18 months to wean the calf. Only a single calf is born at a time and aside from mothers with their young or males following a receptive female, manatees are generally solitary creatures” (Encyclopedia of Mammals).

**Preservation**

Manatees, some of the friendliest and most gentle known creatures of the sea deserve to be protected and conserved for the sake of their species and our planet. Sadly, some species of manatee are endangered and reaching a close point of extinction. Fortunately, some actions have been taken to reduce the exploitation of this wonderful animal. “The Marine Mammal Act was a law that was passed in 1972 to protect marine mammals from hunting. Marine mammals included seals, sea lions, whales, dolphins, porpoises, sea otters, and, of course, manatees” (The Crystal River Florida Expedition). However, this has obviously not cut out hunting completely and more of an effort needs to be made in order to encourage a regrowth in the manatee species. One of the huge problems that leads to endangerment of marine mammals is the continuous corruption to their natural habitat. As human beings, it is our responsibility to care for our planet, since we were granted the knowledge to do so. This means not littering, substituting trawls and other methods of catching fish for simple harpooning and casting lines. By reverting back to primal methods of fishing (we can learn from the Native Americans and other ancient, productive civilizations) humans will negate greed and adhere to a more self sustainable method, thereby reducing unnecessary killing of fish and marine mammals.

**Bibliography**


