



Gentle Giants of the Bay

One of the most endangered animals in Florida is the West Indian Manatee (*Trichechus manatus*) found along the Atlantic Coast and Gulf of Mexico. These gentle giants, also known as sea cows, are considered the waterborne relatives of elephants. Manatees are warm-blooded marine mammals that breathe air just as we do; however manatees surface the waters to breath about every four minutes. The total population of manatees in Florida is about 2,200. Weighing up to 3,500 pounds, manatees can consume as much as 10 percent of their body weight and spend 6-8 hours a day feeding! In the sea, they like to feed on leafy greens such as sea grasses. Strangely enough, manatees were thought to be mermaids by mariners of the past. These sailors must have had too many rations of rum to confuse a manatee for a mermaid. The biggest problem manatees face are encounters with boats. Remember to operate your boat at minimum wake and obey the posted speed zones in protected manatee areas.

