

FIELD GUIDE TO NORTH AMERICAN MAMMALS

**West Indian Manatee**  
*(Trichechus manatus)*

ORDER: Sirenia  
FAMILY: Trichechidae

**Conservation Status:** Both the parent species and the Florida Manatee, *T. manatus latirostris*, are Vulnerable.

West Indian manatees are big, slow-moving, gentle vegetarians. They live in warm, shallow water in coastal rivers, estuaries, and lagoons. In winter, large groups of manatees sometimes congregate where warm water is being discharged from factories. Manatees feed on underwater vegetation, including algae, and sometimes graze on plants growing on shore that hang within their reach, but they never haul themselves out of the water. When they are active, they surface every few minutes to breathe, but when they are resting they can stay submerged for almost half an hour. Females produce a calf (occasionally twins) every two or three years. The calf stays very close to its mother until it is weaned, which can be as long as two years. Mother and calf communicate with squeaks and grunts.

**Also known as:**  
Caribbean Manatee, Sea Cow, Manati, Vaca Marina

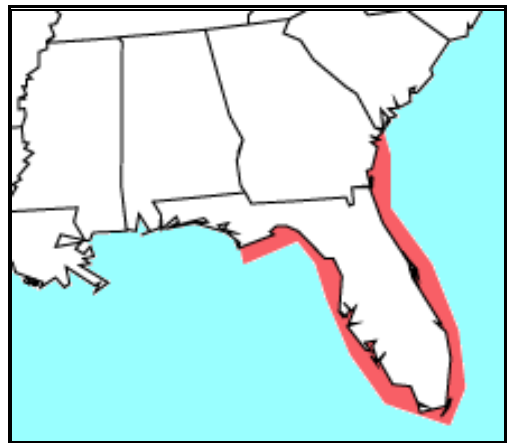
**Sexual Dimorphism:**  
Females are larger than males.

**Length:**  
Range: 2.8–3.5 m

**Weight:**  
Range: 500–1,650 kg



*Trichechus manatus* – male holding some plants, right; female with juvenile, center; inset on the left shows nipple located just under flipper  
Credit: painting by Sandra Doyle/Wildlife Art Ltd. from *Kays and Wilson's Mammals of North America*, © Princeton University Press (2002)



**FIELD NOTES**

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