

Manatees and How They Live

Synopsis

This timely educational program examines the life, habits, and anatomy of the only member of the Sirenian order found within the United States—the West Indian manatee. Manatees are large, solitary marine mammals that look like a cross between a seal and a whale. They are very gentle, eat only aquatic plants, and have no natural enemies. Yet the manatees of Florida and the Caribbean are struggling to survive.

Viewers are introduced to the manatee through stunning underwater cinematography that shows all aspects of their lives, from eating, sleeping and playing, to nursing their young and showing their curiosity towards humans. This natural curiosity causes many manatees to die each year from lacerations by boat propellers. Furthermore, loss of habitat is taking its toll on the manatees at an alarming rate. It is now believed that there are perhaps less than 2500 manatees remaining in the United States, and that extinction could come as early as the year 2000, unless preventive steps are taken immediately.

This program addresses the threats facing the manatees and some of the steps which have been taken to protect them. Filmed almost entirely in Florida, viewers are given a rare glimpse into the watery world of one of the most endangered marine mammals on earth.

Questions to ask before viewing

- What is a mammal? Name a few. What do they have in common?
- How are marine mammals like land mammals? How are they different?
- What type of senses might in a marine mammal develop which would allow it to survive in the water, compared with a land mammal?

Questions to ask after viewing

1. Where is the West Indian manatee found? (Throughout Florida and the West Indies, which includes the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico.) Where are the other types of sirenians found? (In the Amazon, West Africa, and the South Pacific.)
2. What did Columbus think when he first saw manatees? (He thought they were mermaids, but not as beautiful as legends had described them!)
3. How are manatees like whales? (They are marine mammals; they have a horizontally flattened tail like a whale's flukes; they have front flippers; and they have blubber, although much less than whales have.)
4. How are manatees unlike whales? (They inhabit both salt water and fresh water; they are plant-eaters; they can live only in warm water; and they usually do not travel in groups.)
5. What type of teeth do manatees have? (Manatees have molars in the back of their mouths which they use for grinding the tough plants they eat. These molars are replaced throughout the life of manatees.)

6. What senses do manatees have? (Manatees have the same senses as other mammals, but theirs are adapted for use in water. They have eyes that see well in water; internal ears which hear well in water; and flippers that can touch and hold on to objects.)
7. Why do manatees go to warm-water springs in the winter? (Warm-water springs provide the warmth that the manatees need to survive through the winter when ocean water temperatures drop too low.)
8. What "special thing" can manatees do with their nostrils? (Manatees can close them off while diving to keep water out.)
9. How much food does a manatee eat every day? (As much as 10% of its body weight.)
10. How do manatees sleep? (They rest on the bottom in shallow water, and surface for a breath of air every few minutes.)
11. What are the two largest threats facing manatees? (Habitat destruction and collision with boats.)
12. Can you think of any ways that boat collisions could be avoided? (Open to discussion.)

Additional Activities

- Manatees are an endangered species. Prepare a report on how their extinction would affect their environment.
- Research how a species is declared endangered. How does the government try to protect them?
- Research other animals that are endangered, then discuss the reasons why they became endangered.
- How can you help protect an endangered species?

Related titles in the AIMS collection

Animals and How They Live Series
All About Animals Series

Length

- 25 minutes

Subject area

- Life Science

Audience Levels

- Junior High-Adult

Catalog Number

- 8663

Annotation

This educational program explores the life, habits, and anatomy of the greatly endangered West Indian manatee, found throughout the Caribbean and Florida and discusses the steps that have been taken to protect them. Beautiful cinematography offers viewers a rare glimpse into the watery world of this herbivorous marine mammal. Produced by Oceanic Research Group, Inc.

Oceanic Research Group, Inc. is a non-profit environmental organization dedicated to the conservation of the world's oceans and marine life through education.

AIMS Multimedia
9710 DeSoto Avenue
Chatsworth, Ca 91311
(818) 773-4300
www.aimsmultimedia.com

AIMS
Discussion Guide

Manatees and How They Live

Objectives

- To introduce viewers to an endangered marine mammal species.
- To teach the importance of preserving all living things, including manatees.
- To help viewers appreciate the role of marine mammals in their ecosystem.
- To teach the physical and evolutionary differences and similarities between marine and terrestrial mammals.

