

4-1979

## **Manatee Monitor, April 1979**

Florida. Department of Natural Resources. Bureau of Education and Information

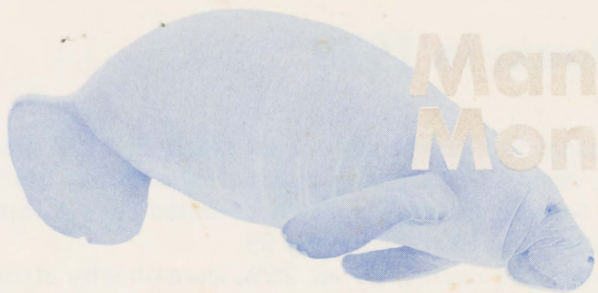
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### **Recommended Citation**

Florida. Department of Natural Resources. Bureau of Education and Information, "Manatee Monitor, April 1979" (1979). *Environment and Natural History Publications*. 18.  
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# Manatee Monitor

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## Boat Speed Regulations Passed

Boaters will be required to operate their craft at slow or idle speed in manatee critical habitat areas following recent action by Florida's Governor and Cabinet.

The Department of Natural Resources' Marine Patrol will enforce speed zone regulations in the 10 affected counties from Nov. 15 to March 31 each year.

Specified "slow speed," "idle speed" and "motorboats prohibited" zones have been charted by the DNR and manatee biologists in the areas of the animal's largest winter concentrations.

"We still have to wait for the Legislature to appropriate funds for posting of signs and additional manpower for proper enforcement of the law," noted Marine Patrol Director Col. Cliff Willis. "Three areas are of crucial concern for increased enforcement: Citrus and Lee counties and the Intracoastal Waterway from Palm Beach to Brevard counties," he added.

Each zone will be clearly marked with Florida Uniform Waterway Marking System signs. The signs are to be in place from November through March. Areas to be posted include portions of Lee, Brevard, Indian River, St. Lucie, Palm Beach, Broward, Citrus, Volusia, Hillsborough and Martin counties.

The manatee, or sea cow, is a marine mammal currently on the federal register of endangered species. Florida's Manatee Sanctuary Act of 1978 affords the animal additional protection and mandates the controlled boat speed areas.

Manatees flee the cold ocean and inland water for warmer refugia when the air temperature dips below 50 F. The refugia are mostly the effluents from electric power generating plants but also include some natural springs.

The docile vegetarians must congregate in refuge areas during colder weather to avoid pneumonia and death. During the rest of the year they are solitary animals dispersed along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts and the state's inland waters.

# Deaths Down in 1978

The endangered Florida manatee fared better in 1978 than in the previous year, according to figures released recently by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Seventy-eight documented deaths were recorded last year, while the 1977 figure was 99.

Of the 78 reported deaths, 20, or 26%, were directly attributable to boat or barge collisions. Nine animals were crushed or drowned in flood gates and one died from a gunshot wound. A positive cause of death could not be determined for 36, almost half, of the salvaged manatees. This was due to the badly decomposed condition of the recovered animals. Twelve died either from natural causes or birth-related incidents.

Last year's lower mortality statistics, while welcome news to those concerned with saving the species, should not automatically be interpreted as a turnaround for the declining manatee population, caution USFWS and Department of Natural Resources officials.

"Although the mortality figures show a substantial decline in 1978, the data base is too narrow to draw positive conclusions as to cause," commented Harry Harper, DNR information director. "It is premature to identify trends, but we would hope the Department's public education and awareness efforts could be held partially responsible for the decline," Harper added. The decrease probably also reflects the milder Florida winter of 1978.

The DNR launched a statewide media effort to save the manatee in November 1978. Included in the campaign are television announcements, billboards, posters, a traveling county fair exhibit, brochures and periodic news releases.

The USFWS also reports the first two months of 1979 look better for manatees than the same period a year ago. Seventeen deaths are on record for January and February of this year, while the 1978 figure for the two months was 25.



**Manatee Hotline 800-342-1821**

Toll free for reporting death, injury or harassment, 24 hours a day



## MANATEE MORTALITY 1978

CAUSE OF DEATH	
Boat/Barge Collision	20 (26%)
Crushed/Drowned in Flood Gate	9 (12%)
Other Human Related	1 (1%)
Perinatal	9 (12%)
Undetermined	36 (46%)
Other	3 (4%)
Total	78 (100%)

MONTH	
January	9
February	16
March	13
April	6
May	6
June	7
July	2
August	2
September	4
October	6
November	3
December	4

## Mississippi Manatee Recovering

If it wasn't for Sea World, an oceanarium near Orlando, the manatee population would be one individual smaller today. Sea World dispatched a rescue crew and truck to Gulfport, Miss. to capture a confused, sick manatee from the chilly waters off that coastal city.

Staff of the large marine park frequently aid in the rescue and treatment of beached or injured manatees, but mostly in Florida.

Manatees must retreat to warmer Florida waters in winter for their survival. Beauregard, as the animal was later named, was obviously lost.

Eight-hundred pound Beau was netted and lifted by crane onto a waiting truck for the 12-hour ride to the warmth and safety of a Sea World tank. Ed Asper, Sea World animal curator, reported the manatee suffered from a bad cold and lung infection, but pneumonia had not set in. The animal was also dehydrated.



*Beauregard leaves Gulfport in style*

After treatment with antibiotics, Beau's infection cleared up. The latest reports from Asper indicate there has been no appreciable weight gain for the captive sea cow, but the dehydration and a parasite infestation are under control.

Beauregard is eating romaine lettuce to the tune of about \$60 a day, a good sign. But Asper cautions, "Our prognosis is guarded. The animal's weight is being carefully monitored and a blood sample is taken every week. The next months will be a time of rest and recuperation to give the animal an opportunity to regain strength and weight."

The blood tests are part of a study of manatee reproductive hormones being conducted with the University of Florida. Beauregard, a male, is believed to be sexually mature. This could prove to be a boon for Sea World researchers since they also have a mature female in residence at the park. Both manatees now share the same tank.

Very little is known about manatee physiology. The possibility for studying estrous cycles in females and how they affect testosterone cycles in males is an exciting one for Asper and his associates. Understanding breeding responses is critical in researching the potential for the recovery of an endangered species.

As far as Beau's tenure at Sea World is concerned, Asper won't hazard a guess. "At this time, we just don't know when the animal will be able to be released back into the wild. There are too many variables."

The total cost of the rescue operation, some \$3,500, was absorbed by Sea World as part of its expanding marine mammal research efforts.

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