
January 1993

Manatees and Dugongs

Florida Field Naturalist

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Recommended Citation

Florida Field Naturalist (1993) "Manatees and Dugongs," *Florida Field Naturalist*. Vol. 21 : Iss. 1 , Article 6.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/ffn/vol21/iss1/6>

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Fla. Field Nat. 21(1):22, 1993.

Manatees and Dugongs.—John E. Reynolds III and Daniel K. Odell. 1991. New York, Facts On File, Inc. ISBN 0-8160-2436-7. \$24.95.—Of all endangered species in Florida, the manatee is probably the most familiar to the general public and has the greatest popular appeal. Since the pioneering research of Joseph Curtis Moore in the 1950s, who first used distinctive scar patterns and other markings to identify individuals, and that of Daniel S. Hartman in the late 1960s, who was the first to employ intensive underwater observations, research on the Florida manatee has burgeoned. It is probably safe to say that the level of funding for manatee research and conservation, the number of scientists involved, and the volume and scope of the reports and publications produced has surpassed that for any other endangered species in the United States and perhaps the world.

In this book, John E. Reynolds III, professor of biology and marine sciences at Eckerd College, and Daniel K. Odell, research biologist at Sea World of Florida, have successfully distilled and interpreted much of the available data on the evolution, distribution, biology, and conservation of sirenians, the mammalian order to which the manatees and dugongs belong. Both authors have spent many years studying manatees and other marine mammals and have been in the forefront of marine mammal conservation efforts, including serving on the Committee of Scientific Advisors on Marine Mammals to the U. S. Marine Mammal Commission.

The opening section of the book traces the evolutionary history of the sirenians and their relationships to other groups of mammals. The authors then review the interactions, largely detrimental to the animals, between humans and sirenians. Many special rituals have become associated with the hunting of manatees and dugongs by native peoples in different parts of the world; and they are the subject of numerous myths and tales. It is believed that sightings of manatees or dugongs by ancient seamen, obviously too long at sea, was the source of the mermaid legend.

The bulk of the volume consists of accounts covering the anatomy, behavior, natural history, range, and population status of the four living species of sirenians. These include the West Indian manatee (*Trichechus manatus*), with two subspecies, the Florida manatee (*T. m. latirostris*) and Antillean manatee (*Trichechus m. manatus*); the Amazonian manatee (*Trichechus inunguis*); the West African manatee (*Trichechus senegalensis*); and the dugong (*Dugong dugong*). Another chapter is devoted to the extinct Steller's sea cow (*Hydrodamalis gigas*), which is unique among sirenians in its large size (estimated to reach 8 m), lack of dentition and finger bones, apparent inability to dive, and habitat and range — the frigid waters of the North Pacific. The slaughter of the entire population of this remarkable animal by explorers and fur hunters within 27 years following its discovery in 1741 is one of the most blatant examples of modern man's destructive impact on the earth's biota.

The final section of the book deals with conservation of sirenians, with emphasis on the Florida manatee. The authors note that despite the intensive research over the past 20 years or so much remains to be learned about population dynamics, habitat requirements, and other aspects of manatee biology in order to develop more effective conservation measures. Although reduction of mortality from human activities, primarily collisions with boats, is of immediate concern, long-term survival of the Florida manatee, as well as other sirenians, is ultimately linked to habitat protection. The book closes with an eloquent essay by Daryl P. Domning on the reasons for protecting manatees, most of which are equally relevant to all endangered and threatened species. Selected references are given for each chapter and include most of the important publications on manatees and dugongs. The book is well-illustrated with drawings and both black-and-white and color photographs.

I recommend *Manatees and Dugongs* as an accurate and highly readable source of information for any person, professional biologist or not, with an interest in learning more about the Florida manatee and its relatives, an unusual and fascinating group of animals.—**James N. Layne**, Archbold Biological Station, P.O. Box 2057, Lake Placid, Florida 33852.