



FLORIDA MANATEE

Trichechus manatus latirostrus

Migration Patterns

Even though manatees are very large, they cannot survive in colder waters. The changing of the seasons also brings the migrations of these large mammals from the colder waters of the ocean into the warmer waters of lagoons and rivers. Once manatees have established their seasonal migration paths, they become creatures of habit and will migrate the exact path every year. This can lead to problems when the manatee uses man-made places, like power plants, to warm up since we regularly shut them down for maintenance and other reasons.



Feeding Behavior

Florida manatees are herbivores, or plant eaters. They specialize in sea grasses, as well as some species of algae, coastal plants, and even mangrove leaves. Their lips are large and highly maneuverable with tiny, sensitive hairs used for sensory. These specialize hairs, called vibrissae, are similar to the whiskers on mice and cats in that individual hair has its own blood supply and nerve cluster. Inside their mouth, 'marching molars', or replaceable molars, grind the grass into a more easily digestible food source. Manatees swim slowly and leave 'feeding trails' or large tracks of grassless paths, in their wake.



Buoyancy Control

Manatees do not have swim bladders to help regulate their buoyancy and stay horizontal in the water column. Several things help, including the dense ribs located towards the front of the body and no hind limbs. Another method used with great results is actually flatulence. Manatees release or store gasses in their system to drop or rise at will.



Sources

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