

# MANATEE



The West Indian manatee (*Trichechus manatus*), one of only four species of sirenians that exist in the world, is the only member of the order Sirenia that lives in the United States. Large seal-shaped creatures with flippers as forelimbs and paddle-like rounded tails, manatees average 10 feet in length and 1,000 - 2,500 in weight as adults. These slow-moving creatures, also known as "sea cows," spend most of their time eating, resting or traveling in the rivers, estuaries, saltwater bays, creeks and canals along the coast.

The manatee is listed under the federal Endangered Species Act as an endangered species and is also protected federally under the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 and statewide under provisions of Georgia's Endangered Wildlife Act of 1973. Minimum estimates suggest that there may be fewer than 2,640 manatees left in the United States. Human-related impacts such as boat/barge collisions, loss of habitat, pollution and ingestion of fish hooks and lines threaten the continued existence of the manatee here in the United States.

Manatees are most frequently sighted in Georgia waters from April through October in the waters of Camden, Glynn and McIntosh counties, during which time wildlife biologists with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (GA/DNR) Nongame-Endangered Wildlife Program monitor their activities.

To date, the most significant human-related cause of manatee mortality is collisions with boats and barges. Because of their inability to move quickly, manatees cannot escape fast boats or barges moving through shallow water.

## Reduce the Risk of Collisions

- Stay in deep water or designated channels. Avoid vegetated or shallow areas. Slow down!
- Do not pass over a submerged manatee
- Keep at least 50 feet from manatees at all times

## To Further Help the Manatee

- Should you encounter manatees while you are swimming, look but do not touch
- Do not discard plastic waste or fishing line in water. Manatees, sea turtles and other wildlife are often injured or killed by ingesting plants that are tangled with fish hooks and line
- Report all sightings to the Nongame-Endangered Wildlife Program coastal office at (800) 272-8363 during work hours or (800) 241-4113 after hours or on weekends