

Manatee Transcript

Whoever heard of a veterinarian who takes care of manatees? Dr. Mark T. Lowe has been a veterinarian for 26 years and once a week he takes care of manatees in Homosassa Springs, Florida. He gets in the water with the manatees and gives them their vitamins and looks at them to make sure they are generally healthy.

His first experience with manatees was in 1989 when he was called down to Homosassa to look at one of the manatees that had a little minor skin rash. He got in the water with her and when he touched her, he could feel the warmth of her body. As he worked more with manatees, he noticed that they seem to have their own personalities. The more he watched them, the more fascinated he became. He said, "It was like something just flipped a switch in me and told me that I had to do everything I could do to possibly help them."

One of the biggest problems in Florida is that manatees get hit by boats. If you look closely at some of the manatees, you'll see scars on their sides. Because of this problem, Florida has developed a large public education program designed to educate people about manatees and how to keep them safe.

Manatees are part of the scientific order called Sirenia. Animals in this order are aquatic herbivores, animals that spend their lives in water and only eat plants. In the wild, manatees tend to graze an average of 8 to 10 hours a day.

Animals like whales and dolphins live in the water but they eat fish. Manatees don't eat meat at all.

It's not clear how many manatees live in Florida. Historically, experts do not believe that a large number of manatees ever lived in Florida. But in the 1960s and 1970s, it appeared that the manatee population seemed to be declining. In fact, they were one of the first animals to be put on the endangered species list.

The biggest problem for manatees is that people come to Florida and build nice homes on a waterfront, which takes away a lot of vegetation. Then they put fertilizer on their lawns. It runs into the water and degrades or changes the water quality. Then plant growth diminishes. At one time, about 60% to 80% of the grass beds in Tampa Bay were dead because of pollution. It is starting to come back, which is good for the manatees. The bottom line is that people are messing up the environment and that affects manatees and the plants they eat.

Dr. Lowe feeds the manatees when he gives them their vitamins. He feeds them an elephant supplement, which is made by a feed company. He feeds manatees elephant food because manatees' closest land relative is the elephant.

Some people wonder if manatees can smell underwater. Scientists think they have chemo receptors that help them taste water and get different scents in water.

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Date: _____

Manatees can grow to be very large. One of Dr. Lowe's manatees weighs 2500 pounds! You might wonder how long manatees live. Although scientists are not sure, they think they live to be 60 or 70 years old. The oldest one in captivity that Dr. Lowe knows about is 53 years old.

Dr. Lowe finds it fascinating to work with the manatees. He thinks they're trying to tell him something. He feels like they give him a feeling of serenity. He believes they're telling him to slow down, smell the roses, and to be peaceful.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Manatee Fact and Opinion Chart

FACTS	OPINIONS
Fact: Reason it's a fact:	Opinion: Reason it's an opinion:
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