

ECOWATCH

Look out for manatees and sea turtle hatchlings

■ BY DELORES SAVAS

“Labor Day weekend marks the official end of summer, and at this time of year, manatees can be found in all kinds of waterways around southeastern U.S., from freshwater rivers and lakes to salt-water coastal areas and canals.

With the holiday weekend bringing busy boat traffic, boaters are urged to boat slowly in posted manatee speed zones and watch carefully for manatees on the move.”

Save the Manatees Club



Every holiday many recreational boaters head for a day of enjoyment on Florida’s waterways, and according to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (CWA), Florida continues to lead the nation in registered recreational vessels on the water, having passed the one million mark as of 2022.

This figure may be great for the boating industry, but it is a nightmare for the slow-moving manatees, whose numbers are a mere 6,000 or so left in Florida waters.

More than 100 manatees are killed by boat strikes every year. It is difficult for manatees to dodge the influx of new and seasoned boaters on Florida’s waterways, especially if the boaters do not follow the rules. While many boaters are responsible drivers, many others feel they are privileged to drive as recklessly as they wish, treating the waters as a speeding event.

There are many things that boaters must be aware of if they are out on the water. According to Patrick Rose, the executive director of the Save the Manatee Club, “When we are boating in their aquatic habitat, we must take care not to disturb them, and especially not to hurt them.” Blunt impact from accidental watercraft collisions is a leading cause of manatee injuries in Florida. The biggest threats manatees continue to face are the result of

human impacts. Almost all manatees have scars from a watercraft collision.

Here are some safety tips to keep down the number of injuries and deaths from human interactions with these gentle giants:

- Wear polarized sunglasses to reduce glare, which will help you see better in recognizing that the animals may be close to the boat or underneath it.
- Have a designated spotter on your boat who can alert you to any wildlife that may be around.
- Avoid steering your watercraft into shallow areas where manatees could be grazing.
- Look for “manatee footprints,” large circles in the water that form above manatees as they move around, and move away from any such area promptly.
- Obey the speed limit posted in FWC seasonal manatee protection zones and in “no wake” zones.
- Keep your eye out for manatee snouts peeking above the water.
- Never approach, feed or give water to manatees. Report injured, dead, beached, entangled or sick manatees – or those being harassed by another boater – to the FWC by calling (888) 404-3922, or emailing or texting tip@MyFWC.com.

According to the Clearwater Marine Aquarium (CMA), last year there was an unusually high count of sea turtles with boat-strike injuries. The CMA has

seen an increase in injuries, even fatalities, among sea turtles and other wildlife due to the high number of boaters that were out on the water. “With the busy summer and a lot more people out there, we are running into a lot more trouble for marine life that have encountered some kind of watercraft trauma,” reported Cassandra Starr, a sea turtle rehabilitation specialist with CMA. “So far this year, we have seen 33 turtles that have been affected by some kind of watercraft, and unfortunately only four of them have come in alive. Eighty-five percent of the turtles that come in alive end up succumbing to their injuries.”

Follow the same precautions that you would hopefully follow for spotting manatees in the water. “If you see any animal, especially sea turtles, out of the water, they will typically evade you and swim away. However, if you notice that they are actually on the water surface and are not evading you or swimming away as you get closer, something could be wrong,” said Hanna Roger, biologist at CMA. “You are in their space. Respect them and be aware, so we can help prevent injuries.”

If you think you may have struck an animal, CMA recommends that you stay in the area keeping your eyes on the animal and calling the CMA hotline at (727) 441-1790 or the FWC hotline at (888) 404-3922.

This year the island is facing the continuing problem of people who come here as visitors or are new property owners and don’t know or choose to ignore the Lee County turtle lighting ordinance. It is customary when units are rented that the realtor or owner will tell any visitor of the ordinance, which states that from May 1 through October 31 of each year, beach residents must shield all lights that can be seen from the beach during the hours from 9 p.m. to 7 a.m. Sea turtle hatchlings instinctively move toward the light out over the ocean and move toward it. When hatchlings are confused by artificial lights, they will be disoriented and wander inland, become lost, and will soon die from dehydration, heat exhaustion or being struck by traffic on nearby streets.

Light can travel great distances, so shielding is important so that lights do not directly or indirectly illuminate the beach. Please close all curtains or blinds after 9 p.m. Any owner, renter or guest who violates the ordinance will be held responsible for any fine that is issued, to the tune of \$250 for the first violation and \$500 for any violation thereafter.

Let us protect our wildlife. They are, after all, an important part of our island’s mystique.

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TIDES & SKIES

September 1 - 7

Boca Grande Tides

SEPTEMBER		3 SUN	High	3:41 am	5 TUE	High	4:07 am
1 FRI	High	3 SUN	Low	9:49 am	5 TUE	High	12:10 pm
	Low		7:47 am	Low		12:10 pm	
2 SAT	High	4 MON	High	4:35 am	6 WED	High	4:36 am
	Low		8:40 pm	Low		1:34 pm	Low
2 SAT	High	4 MON	High	3:44 am	7 THU	High	5:25 am
	Low		8:47 am	Low		3:00 pm	Low
2 SAT	High	4 MON	High	6:02 pm	7 THU	High	5:25 am
	Low		3:22 pm	Low		9:18 pm	Low
2 SAT	High	4 MON	High	9:04 pm	7 THU	High	5:25 am
	Low		9:04 pm	Low		9:18 pm	Low

LUNAR CALENDAR

- Last Quarter
Sep 6 - 6:21 p.m.
- New Moon
Sep 14 - 9:40 p.m.
- First Quarter
Sep 22 - 3:32 p.m.
- Full Moon
Sep 29 - 5:57 a.m.

SUNRISE

Friday, Sep. 1 - 7:08 a.m.
Saturday, Sep. 2 - 7:09 a.m.
Sunday, Sep. 3 - 7:09 a.m.
Monday, Sep. 4 - 7:09 a.m.
Tuesday, Sep. 5 - 7:10 a.m.
Wednesday, Sep. 6 - 7:10 a.m.
Thursday, Sep. 7 - 7:11 a.m.

SUNSET

Friday, Sep. 1 - 7:49 p.m.
Saturday, Sep. 2 - 7:48 p.m.
Sunday, Sep. 3 - 7:47 p.m.
Monday, Sep. 4 - 7:46 p.m.
Tuesday, Sep. 5 - 7:45 p.m.
Wednesday, Sep. 6 - 7:44 p.m.
Thursday, Sep. 7 - 7:42 p.m.