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# 1 chapter

The manatee was ready to have her first calf. She had mated nearly 13 months ago.

Some animals mate only at certain times of the year. But manatees breed anytime.

Females are called cows. They weigh about 1,000 pounds. And they are up to ten feet long.



The water was shallow. The cow moved very slowly. Now and then, she felt a small pain. She gave a low squeak each time.

She was puzzled. She didn't know what was happening to her. She had never felt like this.

Once in a while, the cow stopped moving. She paused to eat some water hyacinth. She pushed the plant into her mouth with a flipper. She chewed slowly.

Manatees are herbivores. This means they only eat plants.



The cow felt a hard pain. It was harder than the others. She stopped chewing. She gave a low groan.

The cow rose to the top of the water. She needed air. Then back down she went.

Her pains lasted for two more hours. Finally, Dudley was born. He was born tail first.

The cow moved under her newborn calf. She lifted him to the top. He needed air right away.

Some scientists believe that baby manatees must learn to breathe. They think the calves don't know how at birth.

Dudley's mother kept him near the top. They stayed there a long time.

She nuzzled Dudley's face with her face. He put his mouth against hers. Nuzzling, or kissing, is a way of imprinting. Imprinting is a learning process. An animal learns to recognize its own kind.

Dudley would never forget his mother. And she, of course, wouldn't forget him.



Dudley weighed 64 pounds. He was nearly four feet long. That was from the tip of his muzzle, or nose, to the end of his fluke, or tail.

The cow raised a flipper. She had a nipple under each flipper. Dudley latched onto a nipple.

Dudley nursed underwater for a while. Then his mother brought him to the top to breathe.

Manatees must come up for air every three to five minutes. They must come up even when they sleep.





When they sleep or rest, their heartbeats slow down. Then they don't have to come up as often. They only breathe once about every 15 to 20 minutes.

They have small flaps of skin in their noses. The flaps open to let in air. They close to keep water out.

The water wasn't very deep where Dudley was born. Manatees like water that is less than eight or ten feet deep.

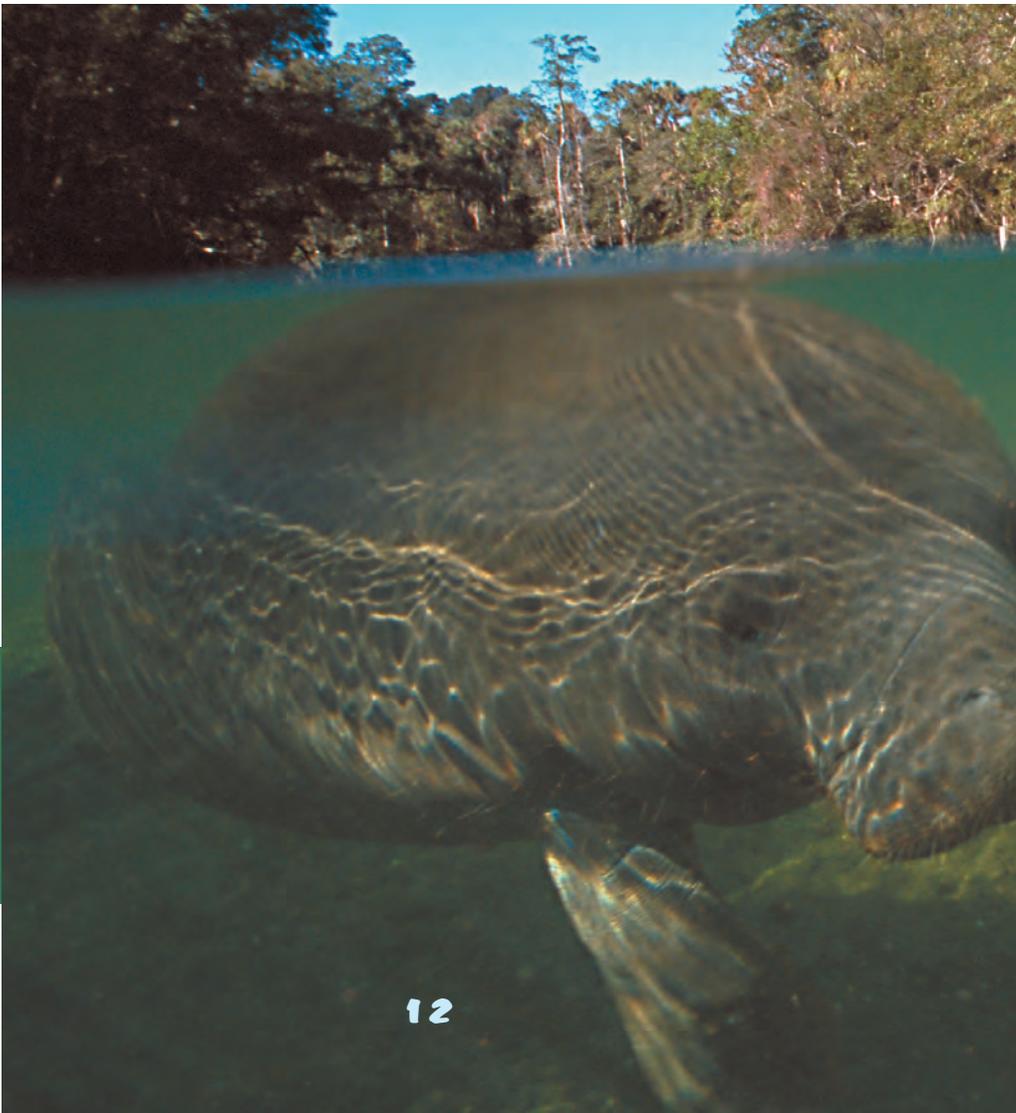




They can dive 25 feet. But they don't very often. Deep water is colder. And manatees need warm water.

Manatees get cold easily. They don't have much body fat. And fat acts like a blanket. It holds in body heat.

Dudley and his mother were West Indian



manatees. They were also called Florida manatees.

Florida manatees can live in saltwater or freshwater. But they seldom go far out to sea. They usually live in shallow, slow-moving rivers and bays. They also live in canals and coastal waters.





# 2

## chapter

Dudley had just been born. And he had visitors already. Two cows and their calves came to see him.

The calves nuzzled Dudley. They wanted to play. But Dudley wasn't ready to play. He was getting used to living outside of his mother's body. He was still learning to breathe. And he was nursing.

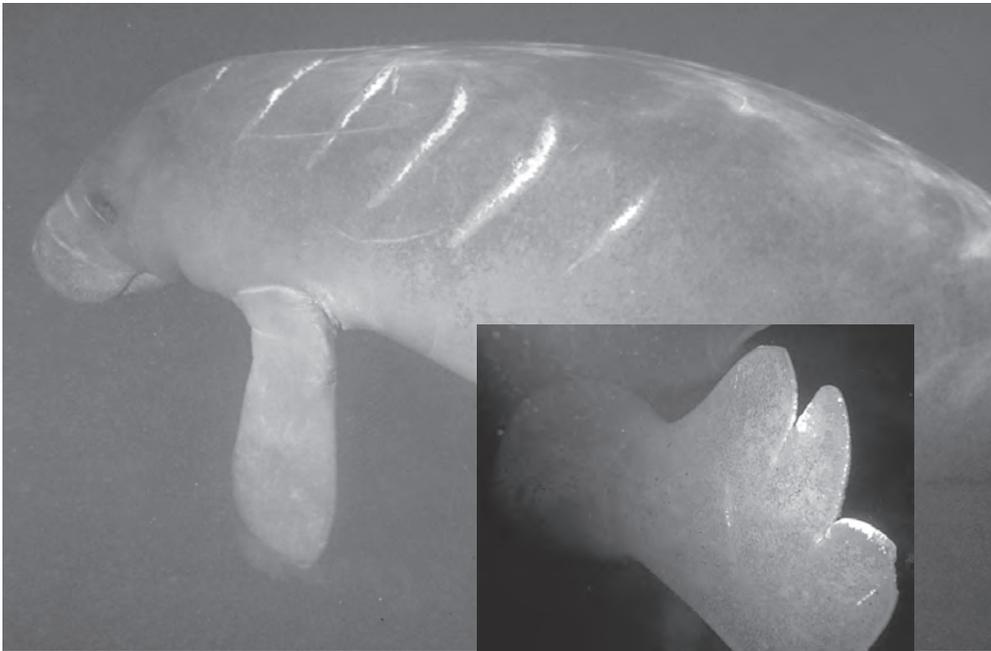


Dudley wasn't afraid of the visitors. But he stayed close to his mother. His mother watched the visitors closely.

Manatees guard their young. The calves stay with their mothers for two years or more. They stay until the mother has another calf.

One of the cows nuzzled Dudley's mother. She nuzzled back.

One visitor had a large chunk of her tail missing. There were several other scars on her body. She had been hurt by a motorboat.





Manatees are often hit by boats. Sharp bottoms and propellers leave huge scars. Scientists recognize manatees by their scars.

Many manatees are killed by motorboats. The first reported death was in 1943.

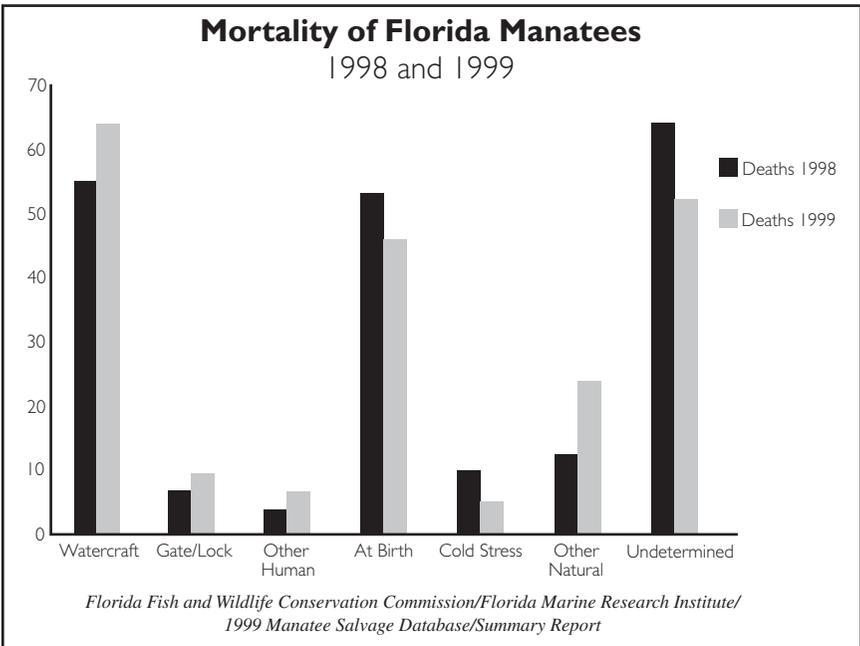
In many waterways and narrow channels, there are speed limits for boats. But even so, many manatees are hurt or killed each year.

Others are crushed by floodgates. Some die from swallowing fishing hooks and lines. Some drown after being caught in fishing nets.

Manatees don't have natural predators. They die from human-related causes, natural causes, or diseases.

In 1996, close to 400 manatees died in Florida from red tide. Until then, there were about 2,400 manatees.

Red tide is a poison that comes from tiny living things. Manatees have been around red tide for years. It didn't seem to be harmful to them until now. Scientists believe that pollution has made red tide harmful.



After a while, Dudley's visitors left.

Dudley floated near the top. He stayed close to his mother. He nursed often. It would be several weeks before he would eat plants.

Like his mother, Dudley had very little hair. Manatees' body hair is thin. The hair around their mouths is very stiff. It's like a brush.

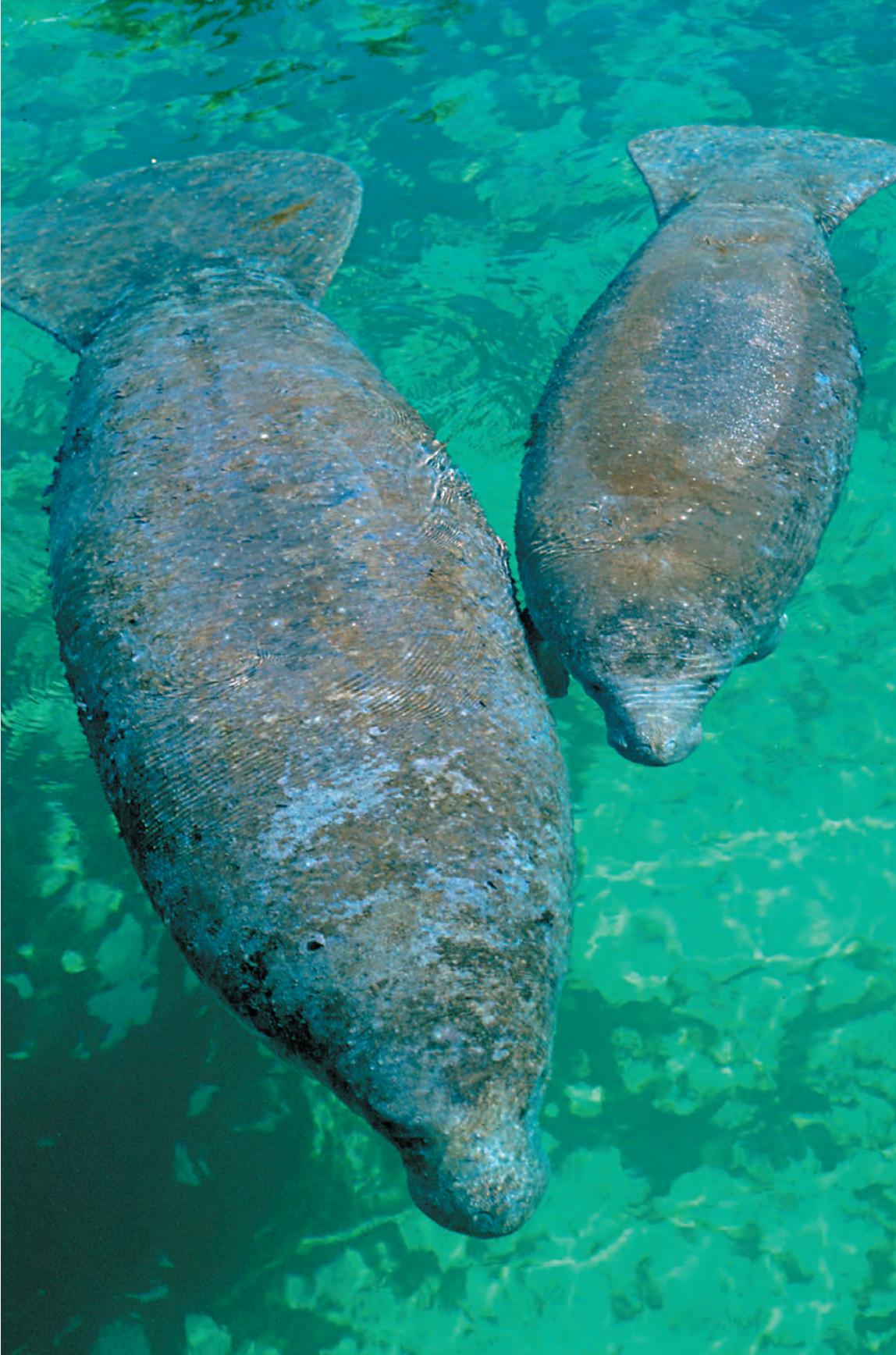
The manatee's upper lip is divided in half. It cuts and tears plants like pliers.

Several plants that manatees eat are very tough. Some animals would have trouble chewing them. But manatees don't. They have strong teeth.

Manatees don't have biting teeth. They only have teeth for chewing. These are called molars. They also have a hard, bony plate on the roof of their mouths.

There are about five or six molars in each part of their jaws. They chew a lot of sand and gravel with their food. So their teeth wear down fast.





New molars grow all the time. As teeth wear down, new molars move forward. They push out the worn ones.

Manatees eat all kinds of grass—mainly ribbon, turtle, and manatee grass. They also eat hydrilla. This is a grassy plant that grows on the bottoms of rivers and streams.



There are some plants they won't eat. One is spatter dock. It tastes bitter.

Manatees prefer plants that grow on the river bottom. Their mouths seem suited for feeding on these.

Sometimes manatees crawl partway onto a bank to eat plants. They even eat acorns that fall into the water.

Manatees often dig up plants near the shore. The small fish scatter. So blue herons and other birds wait close by. Then it's easy for the birds to find fish to eat.



In captivity, manatees are fed lettuce, cabbage, carrots, and even hay.

Manatees chew their food well. On a quiet night, they can be heard chewing up to 200 yards away.

Dudley stayed close to his mother. When his mother swam around, he rode on her back.

He kept his tail tucked up close to his belly. He paddled with his flippers.

Adult manatees don't use their flippers for swimming. The adults swim by moving their flat, paddle-shaped tails up and down. But they move very slowly. They travel between two to four miles per hour.

This is one reason why so many are hurt by boats and jet skis. They can't get out of the way fast enough.

Adult manatees use their flippers to guide themselves as they swim. And they use them for pushing food into their mouths and for scratching themselves. They also use the flippers for cleaning their teeth.



