

## Mark your calendars...

- February 4—Water Education Festival at MOSH (Jacksonville). 10 am—4 pm. Free admission!
- February 16—First Coast Regional Envirothon, Lake Fretwell, Jacksonville. Contact Diane Thomas at 904-266-0088 ext. 191 for information.
- February 23—3 pm—Duval Environmental Educators Network meeting at Jacksonville Zoo. Contact Lesley Royce at lroyce@coj.net for information.
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## Marine mammals in the news

The state of Florida is considering downlisting the status of the Florida manatee from endangered to threatened; two right whale calves are found dead off Jacksonville; a juvenile dolphin is found dead in the Gulf of Mexico, its tail almost completely severed because of entanglement in monofilament fishing line; 2005 was the second highest year for manatee mortalities on record. All of these stories have made headlines in Florida newspapers in January 2006. See articles inside this newsletter for related information.



*M. P. McGuire*

Maia McGuire, PhD  
Marine Extension Agent

Manatee playing with crab trap line. Entanglement in crab traps is the reason for more than half the recorded manatee rescues between 1974 and 2005. Photo from US Fish & Wildlife Service.

## Sea Grant Extension calling for volunteers

The Sea Grant Extension Program in Northeast Florida continues to grow, but our staff remains at one full-time extension agent and one part-time secretary. I would like to establish a pool of volunteers who are willing to help with my education programs, especially at events like fairs and festivals, and with summer camp programs. People who are interested in becoming education volunteers should contact me (Maia) at mpmcg@ufl.edu or 904-209-0430. Please give me your name, contact information (address, phone and/or e-mail), and your availability (e.g. weekdays, evenings or weekends). Some upcoming events include the Washington Oaks Earth Day (April 22 & 23), St. Augustine Earth Day (April 29), First Coast Birding and Nature Festival Kids' Days (May 11 & 12), and summer camps (probably in Callahan, Jacksonville, St. Augustine and Bunnell).

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## Exploring our Environment class April 10-14

Adults who are curious about the coastal environment are encouraged to register for the fifth "Exploring our Environment—from the ocean to the river" class. The program will be offered from April 10-14, 2006 from 9 am to 4 pm each day at the GTM NERR Marineland office. The cost for the week-long program is \$100. The program is a combination of classroom-based lectures and activities, and outdoor activities. Topics covered include beachcombing, sea turtles, marine debris, estuaries, water quality measurement, invasive species, coastal plants, sharks and marine mammals.



Participants in the October 2005 class measure the slope of the beach at Marineland. This data will be used to construct a beach profile database that will show changes in the beach slope over time.

Guest speakers provide expert knowledge on many topics. Participants receive resource materials ranging from books to fact sheets and brochures. No previous knowledge about biology or marine science is required—this program is geared towards the general public. For more information, contact Maia or download the registration form from <http://stjohns.ifas.ufl.edu/sea/seagrant.htm> (follow the education link).

## Manatees

The state of Florida was petitioned to conduct a review of the status of the Florida manatee. This has been completed, and the report is being reviewed by scientists under the peer review process. The report will be presented at the June 2006 meeting of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. It is possible that the state will decide to "downlist" the manatee from endangered to threatened. If this occurs, the state will also have to establish a state manatee management plan to ensure that the manatee does not return to endangered status. The manatee will continue to be listed as an endangered species on the federal endangered species list until the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) determines that the species has "recovered".

The FWS has a manatee recovery team which is tasked with studying the manatee and the threats that face it. There are several working groups that report to the team. One of these working groups deals with manatee entanglement issues. The two primary entanglement threats to manatees are monofilament (fishing line) and crab trap lines; almost 200 manatee rescues in the past 20 years were due to entanglement. The three top counties for manatee rescues because of entanglement (as opposed to boat strikes, cold stress or other causes) are Monroe, Brevard and Lee Counties. Almost all of the entanglements in the Florida Keys are the result of monofilament, whereas most of those in Brevard and Lee Counties were the result of entanglement in crab traps. Biologists are not sure why manatees become entangled—there are certain individual manatees which regularly and repeatedly become tangled up in fishing line (earning them the nickname, "serial entanglers"). We do not know if manatees are actively seeking out fishing line and crab trap ropes to rub against, or if they are encountering these lines accidentally as they swim past. Studies are underway to try and address this question.

## Be a Responsible Wildlife Observer

From July 2004 to July 2005, Florida's human population increased at a rate of over 1,100 people per day. Many Florida residents enjoy being outdoors and observing wildlife. However, it is important that people observe wildlife without harassing or harming them. As human populations grow, there are increasing stresses placed on wildlife—these include loss of habitat, increased encounters with humans (and their vehicles) and loss of food and water sources.



Marine mammals, especially the Florida manatee and the bottlenose dolphin, are always a thrill to see. Biologists caution that marine mammals are protected by federal and state laws, and that people need to be aware of these laws. Penalties for violating the endangered species act or marine mammal protection act include fines of up to \$50,000 and up to one year in jail.

- It is illegal to pet, feed or give water to manatees or dolphins. Feeding these mammals trains them to approach boats or docks for a treat, increasing their risk of being hit by a boat.
- Boats should stay at least 50 yards from wild dolphins (500 yards from right whales, 100 yards from all other whales). If dolphins are “hanging around” while you are fishing, you should stop fishing and motor slowly to another areas away from the dolphins.
- Do not throw fishing line into the water—it is illegal to dump plastics in the ocean and the fishing line might entangle manatees, dolphins, sea turtles, birds or other wildlife.
- Obey posted speed limits when boating.

Other recommendations include the following:

- Wear polarized sunglasses to better see marine mammals in the water and avoid contact
- Do not leave fishing gear unattended
- If you observe an injured or entangled marine mammal or sea turtle, please call the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission at 1-888-404-FWCC (3922).





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coastal Florida*

### More “Mark your calendars”

- February 6–March 14, 2006—Coastal Master Naturalist class (Volusia County). See [www.masternaturalist.org](http://www.masternaturalist.org) to register.
- February 23–March 30—Coastal Master Naturalist class (Volusia County). See [www.masternaturalist.org](http://www.masternaturalist.org) to register.
- April 3–29—Freshwater Wetlands Master Naturalist class (Clay County). See [www.masternaturalist.org](http://www.masternaturalist.org) to register
- April 10–14—Exploring our Environment—from the ocean to the river. GTM NERR office in Marineland. Download a registration brochure from <http://stjohns.ifas.ufl.edu> (click on Sea Grant and follow the education link.)
- April 22–23—Washington Oaks Gardens State Park Earth Day
- April 28–30—Florida Marine Science Educators Association annual conference, Crystal River
- April 29—St. Johns County Earth Day, St. Augustine Amphitheatre
- May 11–14—First Coast Birding & Nature Festival. See [www.GetAway4Nature.com](http://www.GetAway4Nature.com) for more information. Register early for field trips!

Please check the calendars at <http://calendar.ifas.ufl.edu> and [www.enviroedjax.org](http://www.enviroedjax.org) for other environmental education programs around the state.

Aqua Notes is provided as one of the many services relating to educational programs offered by the University of Florida/IFAS cooperative extension service. This publication is available on the Web at <http://stjohns.ifas.ufl.edu> or in an alternate format on special request. In compliance with ADA requirements, participants with special needs will be reasonably accommodated with 5 days advance notice by contacting the St. Johns County Extension Service at 904-209-0430. Those needing telecommunications assistance, please call the Florida Relay Service (TDD) at 1-800-955-8771. The use of websites or product names in this publication is not a guarantee, warranty or endorsement of the sites/products named and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others. For more information about this document, contact Maia McGuire at the St. Johns County Extension Service at 904-209-0430.