



**ABOUT THE AREA** 

The Gulf Coast of Florida is a tropical paradise best known for its aquamarine waters and white sandy beaches. The area features outstanding fishing, boating and wildlife viewing opportunities.

#### Sarasota Bay

Sarasota Bay, a small subtropical estuary located on the Southwest Coast of Florida, is bordered by aquatic preserves— Terra Ceia Bay to the north and Lemon Bay to the south. The crown jewel of the area, Sarasota Bay, is classified as an Outstanding Florida Water and an Estuary of National Significance, designated and protected by the State of Florida and by the U.S. Congress. The Sarasota Bay region is home to a wide variety of marine life. The Bottlenose Dolphin is commonly seen throughout the area. The endangered Florida manatee, a subspecies of the West

Indian manatee, also resides in Sarasota Bay. In addition, the Gulf beaches along the Bay's barrier islands support loggerhead turtles and their annual nesting activities. In 1998, 4,538 nests of loggerhead turtles were found in the region. The Bay also supports a delicious array of fish and crustaceans such as Red Drum, Spotted Seatrout, Snook, Flounder, Blue Crab, Pompano, Mullet, Stone Crab and Shrimp. More than 80 percent of the fish we catch for food or fun depend on estuaries

By boating safely and responsibly, and with enhanced awareness of the region's natural resources, you can help protect Sarasota Bay and the sea life that depends on the estuary for its survival.

for all or part of their lives.

Manatee and Sarasota Counties centers around the Manatee River and Sarasota Bay. Burial, midden, and temple mounds located along the river banks

A Little

Bit Of

History

The rich heritage of

and bay shore have provided evidence of human habitation 10,000 to 12,000 years ago. Over the centuries, waterfront locations continued to attract inhabitants. When settlers first arrived in the 1840s, Florida was not yet a state. The territory was populated by scattered fishermen who came from Cuba and established ranchos on the coast for use primarily during the fishing season. Seminole Indians, though restricted by the federal government to interior lands, mingled with the new arrivals.

At its founding in 1855, Manatee County consisted of 5,000 square miles and extended from the Gulf of Mexico to Lake Okeechobee and from Tampa Bay to Charlotte Harbor. In the 1870s, the notion of Sarasota Bay as a place for recreation originates. By that time the Webbs (early area homesteaders) were advertising the Webb Resort Hotel at Osprey and seasonal visitors began visiting the local bay area. A variety of schooners, some built locally, were used in the bays. In the early 1920s, all of Florida experienced a period of rapid growth. Within the first five years of that decade, the area's population more than tripled, and Sarasota County broke away from Manatee. Always important industries— agriculture and fishing—

The region experienced a population explosion after World War II, with the accompanying growth in industry, shopping centers, schools and tourist attractions and accommodations. As they did centuries ago, the scenic and bountiful waters of Manatee and Sarasota still draw new residents and visitors to its beautiful shores.

eased the counties though the depression of the 1930s.

#### YOU CAN HELP PROTECT SEAGRASSES!

Powerboats can damage seagrass beds. Surveys show almost half of local powerboaters run aground in seagrass beds and spin their propellers which carve out bare, sandy trenches that damage the fragile plants. Here are some tips to avoid running through seagrass beds with your boat.

Read the water color!

Brown, Brown, Run Aground. Blue, Blue, Cruise On Through.

- · Keep track of the tides. Even at high tides some beds are vulnerable.
- · Look for buoys, which mark the edges of some grass beds.
- Read navigation charts. Seagrass is shown as light green; note seagrass coverage in this Sarasota Bay Blueways Guide.
- Read the water. A seagrass bed may appear as a large dark area underwater.

If you do run into a seagrass bed, you will be leaving behind a mud trail where your prop has churned up the bay bottom, clouded the water, and likely cut seagrass roots. It is what you do next that counts:

- Stop the engine.
- Tilt the motor then.
- Pole or walk out of the shallow grass flat.

If you help to protect these vital seagrass meadows you will be a part of the restoration process of Sarasota Bay.

#### ESTUARINE HABITATS

Estuaries, where fresh water from rivers and creeks mixes with saltwater from the sea, are also known as "cradles of the sea." Estuaries provide important spawning grounds and nurseries for at least two-thirds of the nation's fisheries and are among the most biologically productive areas in the world. The two most local important Bay habitats are seagrasses and mangroves.

Seagrasses rass meadows characterize mosi

of the shallow waters of the area. The most common species of grass in the area are shoal grass (Halodule wrightii), widgeon grass (Ruppia maritima), turtlegrass (Thalassia testudinum),

Seagrass beds are important to estuarine productiv ity in many ways. They contribute to the nutrient cycle through decomposition of leaf fragments. The grass beds provide protective nursery area for juvenile fish, shrimp, and crabs, and provide a surface for growth of algal epiphytes which serve as food for fish and crustaceans. Manatees feed directly on seagrasses.

Seagrass roots also bind soils and reduce erosion and

**Birding Tips** 

and manatee grass

(Syringodium filiforme).

Sarasota Bay lost about 30 percent of its seagrass beds between 1950 and 1990 (with additional significant losses prior to 1950). Dredge and fill projects covered and removed grass beds and pollution from wastewater and stormwater damaged or killed seagrass. This decrease in habitat, in turn, contributed to a decrease in the Bay's fishery production. Recent improvements in wastewater and stormwater treatment have led to some recovery of seagrass beds. Between 1988 and 1996 seagrasses have increased by 20 percent for an additional 1,682 acres of seagrass meadows. The increase is correlated with a 30 percent reduction in nitrogen pollution.

What does the recovery mean for Sarasota Bay? Ultimately, more seagrass means a healthier, cleaner Bay...and a better Bay means enhanced fisheries. The 1,682 acres of recovered seagrasses are estimated to provide habitat for an estimated 310 million more shrimp, 68 million more crabs, and 100 million more fish in Sarasota Bay.

#### Wetlands & Mangroves

Healthy wetlands and mangroves are an integral component of the estuary ecosystem. These habitats provide a number of essential benefits to Sarasota Bay; food and shelter to bay life, filtration of pollutants, and shoreline protection

In the past 50 years, effects of development have caused a decline in quantity and quality of Sarasota Bay's wetlands. Since the 1950s, approximately 39 percent of mangrove forests and saltwater wetlands and 16 percent of freshwater wetlands have been lost due to dredge and fill activities for creation of residential bayfront property and the Intracoastal Waterway. Exotic vegetation such as Australian pines and Brazilian pepper now dominate impacted areas. The decline has been reversed only recently. Since 1989, approximately 80 acres of this vital wetland habitat have been restored, and plans are in place to restore an additional 100 acres. Mangroves and wetland areas are an important natural resource because of their beauty, wildlife value, erosion protection, and importance to estuary ecology. Floridians should work to

Here are identification tips on the four different mangrove species found throughout the Bay area. Red mangroves

(Rhizophora mangle) are found closest to open water. They have arching prop roots and their seeds, or propagules, resemble green cigars. Their leaves are large and bright green. Black mangroves (Avicennia germinans) are usually found growing landward of red mangroves. Black mangroves "sweat" salt from their leaves and send up twiggy projections from their roots called pneumatophores, which provide oxygen to the tree's roots. Their leaves are dull green with silver undersides. White mangroves (Laguncularia racemosa) usually grow landward of or are interspersed with black mangroves. Their leaves are more rounded than those of other species, have a small notch at the tip, and are lighter in color. On each leaf stem at the base of the leaf is a pair of small bumps. Green button-

leaves and bears round "buttons" that turn brown. You can visit and learn more about the importance of these wetlands at one of the many restoration sites located on Sarasota Bay by referencing the reverse side of this Sarasota Bay Blueways Guide. Each wetland site offers boardwalks, nature trails, educational signage and bro-

wood (Conocarpus erectus), not a true mangrove, grows in

other mangrove species. It generally has small, elongated

the most landward location of the littoral zone, behind the

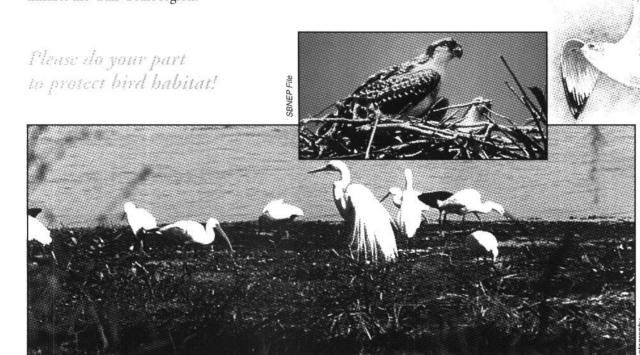
chures. Sites such as Quick Point Nature Preserve, Coquina BayWalk at Leffis Key and the Sarasota BayWalk are accessible by boat and land.



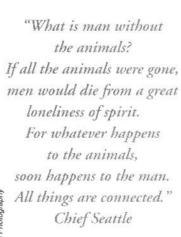
Some common birds to this region that you might see include Great Blue Heron, Snowy Egret, Great Egret, White Ibis, Brown Pelican, Osprey, Wood Stork, Roseate Spoonbill, and the endangered Florida Scrub Jay, to name a few. The reverse side of this Sarasota Bay

Blueways Guide lists bird viewing opportunities such as

bird hot spots and bird rookeries. Loss and fragmentation of habitat is a threat to all birds and to all the species that inhabit the Gulf Coast region.

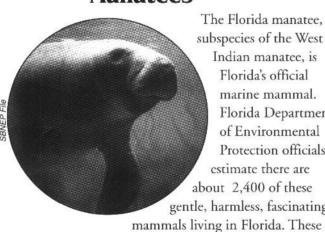


- Enjoy viewing bird rookeries from at least 100 yards away. These rookeries harbor nesting colonies and flocks of feeding birds. Boaters and operators of personal watercraft should slow down in order to reduce wake in these birding areas. Bird islands and mangrove areas are being eroded by boat wakes and boating noise and high speeds are disruptive to the wildlife.
- · Report injured seabirds that need assistance. Consult this Sarasota Bay Blueways Guide Resource Directory for contact information.
- · Pick up marine debris if you find it and don't discard any fishing line or other trash, which can be lethal to seabirds and other marine life.
- . Enjoy the beauty and rare elegance of these magnificent water birds, and remember the best opportunity for viewing is by being quiet and moving slowly.



## MANATEES, TURTLES

## **Manatees**



The Florida manatee, a subspecies of the West Indian manatee, is Florida's official marine mammal. Florida Department of Environmental Protection officials estimate there are about 2,400 of these gentle, harmless, fascinating

gentle giants can grow to a length of 10 feet and can weigh up to 3,000 pounds as adults. Locally, manatees can be found around the fringes of the Bay from April to December. Their numbers are lowest during January and February, when they leave Sarasota Bay to find warm-water refuges elsewhere at power plants and springs. Their distribution in Sarasota Bay corresponds to areas of good seagrass coverage. Seagrass coverage is denoted on the reverse side of the Sarasota Bay Blueways Guide.

Unfortunately, the leading causes of death among Florida manatees are human-related. These include collisions with boat hulls and propellers, entanglement in float and fishing lines and ingestion of foreign objects, such as garbage thrown from boats. You can be part of the solution to ensure these gentle giants make a comeback in Florida.

### HELP SAVE THE MANATEE!

- · Observe all manatee regulatory zones and caution areas. · Stay in designated channels. Channel depth reduces the likelihood of killing or injuring manatees. Use idle speed
- whenever you are outside channels or in shallow water.
- water, which will assist you to see manatees.
- · If you fish, don't discard fishing lines, hooks or nets in

RECREATIONAL

- Avoid shallow seagrass beds, where manatees forage
- · Wear polarized sunglasses to reduce the glare on the
- the water. The refuse can harm manatees as well as other

marine life.

through October, the nesting season. Five species of sea turtles inhabit the Gulf Coast region: loggerhead, green, hawksbill, leatherback, and Kemp's ridley. However, loggerhead turtles, which are classified as threatened, are the predominant species on our beaches. YOU CAN HELP TO PROTECT SEA TURTLES!

• It is illegal to harass, hunt capture, kill, or feed any

one-year imprisonment or both.

children, will thank you for it!

waterways as we do.

**Sea Turtles** 

marine mammal, including manatees. Anything that

disrupts a manatee's normal behavior is a violation,

punishable under federal law by up to a \$50,000 fine,

· Remember we must learn to peacefully coexist with the

just as much right to enjoy the Bay and the Florida

• Save the manatee...your children, and your children's

The Gulf beaches along the bay's barrier islands support

loggerhead turtles and their nesting activities during May

wildlife that inhabits our area and state, manatees have

### · Never approach sea turtles coming ashore or disturb

- nesting sea turtles or hatchlings. Biologists estimate that only about one out of every 2,500 hatchlings survive to the age of sexual maturity.
- · Beachfront property owners should turn off exterior lights in areas where nesting takes place. Bright artificial lights discourage nesting sea turtles from coming ashore and disorient hatchlings, preventing them from reaching



**FISHING TIPS** 

Use live shrimp, sand

#### **Dolphins** Approximately 100 Bottlenose Dolphins, including four generations of related individuals, reside year-round in Sarasota Bay. During the spring and summer, mothers and calves can be found in the shallow waters of Palma Sola Bay and Anna Maria Sound. This is where they enjoy a

plentiful meal of pinfish. pigfish and striped mullet. Additionally, the newborns are safer in the shallow coastal waters away from such predators as adult Bull Sharks, which swim in the Gulf offshore in the summer. In the fall and winter, dolphins are more frequently found in the passes and along Gulf shorelines.

The dolphin population of Sarasota Bay suffers from boating collisions and disturbances and littering of marine debris such as fishing line and plastic bags. These injuries and deaths are senseless and can be prevented. Please follow safety cautions to ensure protection for our region's longterm resident dolphin community.

## **BOATING SAFETY**

Safe, responsible boating on Sarasota Bay and other Florida waterways is every boat operator's responsibility. As more boaters continue to cruise the area's waterways for recreation, safe boating becomes increasingly important to prevent accidents, injury and death. It is the responsibility of the boater to know and observe boating laws. For more information on agencies and organizations that offer safe boating classes and for contact information on receiving boating education material, please see the Resource Directory within this Sarasota Bay Blueways Guide.



### **BOATING TIPS**

- · All boats must be registered. Register at your local tax
- collectors office.
- · Learn to swim. · Wear your Personal Flotation Devices (PFD).
- . Don't drink and drive. Studies indicate as many as 50 percent of all boating accidents may be alcohol related.
- Carry a fire extinguisher.
- All recreational boats must be equipped with visual distress signals and a whistle.
- Use navigation lights between sunset and sunrise. · All vessels should carry an anchor and anchor line of
- sufficient weight and strength. • Follow Navigation Rules. Conduct the vessel in a
- prudent manner and at safe speeds. • To aid in navigation, use channel markers. Red, green pass in between.
- Make sure your boat and equipment are in good condition.
- · Be aware of changing weather conditions. · Follow all slow speed and minimum wake designations.
- KEEP OUR BAYS AND WATERWAYS CLEAN · Stow it, don't throw it. Littering degrades our environment and is unsafe for marine life. Please keep trash from blowing overboard and take in what you take out.

# **COMMON NAME FLOUNDER** RED DRUM (REDFISH) SPOTTED SEATROUT

All year

All year

All year except:

Dec.15-Jan. 31

LEGAL SEASON All year

**HABITAT** Channel edges on sandy bottoms, near tidal passes and docks.

fleas, sardines, pinfish or jigs bounced along bottom as you drift. Minimum size limit: 12" Near docks and pilings, Use live shrimp fished on bottom

deeper holes and channels during warmest and coolest months; around grassbeds and oyster bars. Near bridges, docks,

seawalls and pilings.

Use live shrimp, sand fleas, or hermit or fiddler crabs on small hook. Fish just off the bottom. On the first tug, lower the rod and then strike hard. Minimum size limit: 12"

or free-lined, or use soft-bodied

jigs bounced slowly on bottom,

Minimum size limit: 18"or no more than 27". Daily bag limit: one.

or small gold spoons.

Canals, tidal creeks and other deep, warm waters in cool months; tidal passes and & June, July, Aug. the Gulf in warmer months.

Use live pinfish, small mullet, shrimp or sardines free-lined or fished with a bobber or use jigs and minnow-like lures. Beware of the snook's razor-sharp gills. Minimum size limit: 26" or no more than 34". Daily bag limit: 2.

Use live shrimp or pigfish (grunts)

Florida Department of Environmental Pri Florida Sea Grant College Program University of Florida Marine Extension Service For educational information on Florida's coastal zone and marine resources.

Hart's Landing
A 24 hour hotline for the latest tides and fishing information Manatee and Sarasota County Environmental Departments Sarasota County Natural Resources Department
Manatee County Division of Environmental Management Manatee, Sarasota and Venice Audubon Society Local chapters of the National Audubon Society Mote Marine Aquarium and Laboratory
An independent, non-profit marine research and education facility.

NOAA Weather Service Broadcast WX-1 162.550 MH on VHF marine radio

Pelican Man's Birdl Sanctuary
A sanctuary for more than 200 species of injured birds.
Contact the sanctuary to report injured wildlife.

Local boating organizations promoting and offering the public classes on boating skills and safety.

(941) 388-3532 (941) 792-8467 (941) 485-SAIL (941) 924-6864

(941) 388-4444

Sarasota Anglers Club & Sport Fishing Club

A family-oriented recreational fishing and community service organization. Sponsors sportfishing tournaments.

#### RESOURCE DIRECTORY Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (Patrol) Enforces saltwater fishing and boating laws and regulation Call to report any manatee harassment, injury or death.

Florida Marine Research Institute (727) 896-8626 Estuarine and marine scientific research; a division of the (352) 392-1837 (941) 722-4524 (941) 366-TIDE (941) 861-6230 (941) 742-5980 (941) 364-9212 (941) 388-4441 (941) 388-1908 Provides an automatic weather monitoring station for current wind speed and direction, water and air temperature. (813) 645-2506

Sarasota Anna Maria Island

Seagrass beds when water

All year except:

