



Limpkin

Interesting facts: The voice of the male limpkin, described as a piercing repeated wail, "Kree-ow, Kra-ow," is often heard in the background of old Tarzan movies. The sound of several males calling is described as "one of the weirdest cacophonies of nature." As it walks through shallow water, the limpkin uses sight and touch to search for apple snails, mussels, worms and insects. The sharp and twisted end of its curved bill fits perfectly into a snail shell, allowing the limpkin to deftly extract the mollusk.



American white pelicans

Who's Zooming Who?

Quick tips to improve your wildlife viewing experience

Would you like to see more wildlife when you paddle Florida's abundant waterways and coastline? Follow these simple tips and then get ready for some encounters of the wild kind...

- Enjoy wildlife viewing at a distance, get up close and personal by using binoculars or the zoom lens on your camera.
- The best time for wildlife viewing is in the early morning hours or around sunset when animals are most active.
- Move slowly, keep quiet, and look at the animal indirectly.
- If an animal stops doing what it is doing or moves away, you are too close!
- Leave dogs at home or keep on a leash at all times.

Who are you likely to meet on the water?

Atlantic Bottlenose Dolphin

Colored gray on top and whitish underneath, adult bottlenose dolphins are typically eight to twelve feet long and weigh in at 400-500 pounds. Males are much larger than females. A short and stubby beak gives the species its common name - "bottle-nose."

Interesting facts: Dolphins breathe air at the surface through a blowhole located on top of the head. They need to breathe about every two minutes, but can hold their breath for 10-12 minutes during dives. A muscular flap forms a watertight seal around the blowhole.

Dolphins are expert swimmers and their streamlined bodies and muscular tail flukes enable them to power through the water at speeds of up to 18-22 mph, although they generally average speeds of one-to-two miles per hour.

Dolphin Conservation Tip – Don't Feed Me

Did you know that it is illegal to feed, and to attempt to feed, wild dolphins throughout the United States? Not only are many foods unhealthy for dolphins, but once they lose their natural wariness of humans, they are at an increased risk of injury from boats and entanglement in fishing gear.

North Atlantic Right Whale

Measuring up to 55 feet long, an adult right whale can weigh up to 70 tons, and a newborn calf can measure 15 feet at birth and weigh 2,000 pounds. A right whale has callous growths called callosities, on its head. Callosities are often covered with small, white, crab-like animals called "whale lice" that make the callosity appear white in color. The distinctive patterns of these projections help to identify individual animals.



Interesting facts: Right whales were so named because they were considered the "right" whale to hunt. They were slow swimmers, floated when dead, yielded large amounts of commercially valuable oil and baleen (the 'whalebone' once used in corsets), and were abundant. When exhaling through two blowholes located on top of their heads, right whales produce a distinctive V-shaped blow, or spray of air and water, visible from a distance.

Alligators



Alligators live in all 67 counties, and inhabit all wild areas of Florida that can support them. Nearly all alligators become sexually mature by the time they reach approximately 7 feet in length although females can reach maturity at 6 feet. A female may require 10-15 years and a male 8-12 years to reach these lengths. Alligators control their body temperature by basking in the sun, or moving to areas with warmer or cooler air or water temperatures. Alligators are most active when temperatures are between 82 to 92 degrees and stop feeding and become dormant as temperatures drop below approximately 70 and 50 degrees respectively. Alligators are dormant throughout much of the winter season.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) occasionally gets reports of unsettling encounters between a paddler and an alligator. The majority of these appear to be situations in which the boat bumps into an alligator. This could be because the alligator was in shallow water and could not submerge to avoid contact, or the alligator was on a bank and the boat startled the alligator, causing the alligator to escape toward deeper water in an attempt to flee. In a few incidents, alligators have actually bitten canoes and kayaks, resulting in minor injuries to people and damage to their boats.



The best way to protect yourself if you are paddling is to keep your hands and feet inside the boat and to be cautious when entering or leaving the water. You should be especially cautious at dawn, dusk and at night, because that is when alligators are most active.

If you fish from your canoe or kayak, be careful when retrieving fish from the water, and if you keep any fish, do not keep them on a stringer in the water. When back on shore, avoid throwing fish scraps in the water when you clean your fish.



If you have a dog, do not allow your dog to swim in the water (whether you are boating or not), because dogs are at considerable risk from alligators.

If you observe a large alligator swimming toward your canoe or kayak, you should paddle quickly away from the alligator until it is no longer swimming toward you. In the unlikely event that an alligator approaches closely to your boat, slap the water's surface near the alligator with your paddle and move as quickly away as possible. In the extreme circumstance that a large alligator lunges at or bites your boat, rap the alligator on its snout with your paddle and quickly paddle away.

Manatees, like their relatives - elephants, hyraxes and armadillos, have a long gestation period and can regrow their teeth

If you notice an alligator that approaches people or shows no wariness when people are nearby, you can report it to the FWC's Nuisance Alligator Hotline at 1-866-FWC-GATOR (866-392-4286)



Swallowtail kite

Manatees

The manatee is a large, herbivorous, aquatic mammal that inhabits coastal waters and rivers. Adults are typically 9-10 feet long and weigh around 1000 pounds. However, they may grow to over 13 feet and weigh more than 3500 pounds. Adults are gray in color, with very sparse fine hairs distributed over much of the body. Stiff whiskers grow around the face and lips. Algae growing on their skin may make them appear green or brown. They have two forelimbs, usually with 3 or 4 nails, that they use for slow movements and to grasp vegetation while eating. They have a rounded flattened tail for swimming. The nostrils, located on the upper surface of the snout, tightly close with valves when underwater.

While they can hold their breath for up to 20 minutes, they typically surface to breathe approximately every three to five minutes. Their eyes are small and have a membrane that can be drawn over them for protection. The ear openings, located just behind the eyes, are small and lack external lobes but they do hear very well. They have a flexible upper lip that is used to draw food into the mouth.



The bones in a manatee's flipper are like a human hand. The jointed "finger bones" of the flipper help the manatee move through the water, bring food to its mouth, and hold objects.

What more can you do to help wildlife?

Clean Up the Coast

A major threat to many marine species is marine debris. Dolphins may strangle on pieces of plastic sheeting that they mistake for jellyfish and other prey, become entangled in fishing line or plastic strapping, which can drown them or amputate appendages, or ingest fishing hooks and lures. Make it a habit to deposit used fishing line, hooks and lures in a monofilament recycling container located near many beaches and marinas or safely in a trash container. Use 'green bags' when shopping and stop the plastic bag cycle. Consider joining an organized cleanup such as the International Coastal Cleanup held annually statewide in September. For more information, including how to sign up for events in your area, visit [Ocean Conservancy](#).

Loggerhead sea turtle Tips

Threats to loggerheads include loss of wild beaches for nesting; collisions with boats; accidental drowning in fishing trawls; hooking and entanglement in fishing gear; and ingestion of marine debris such as plastic bags and balloons. What can you do? Visit FWC's sea turtle [website](#) and learn about everything from sea turtle friendly outdoor lighting to how to purchase sea turtle decals and license plates that fund research in Florida.

Words for the Birds

Don't you hate it when the doorbell or telephone rings just as you settle down to dinner or a nap? While mere nuisances to us, disruptions in feeding and nesting routines can spell disaster for birds, especially the cumulative effect of frequent disruptions, a common occurrence at busy sites such as beaches and waterways. When a nesting bird is forced to fly, it may leave eggs or young exposed to temperature extremes or predators. A migratory bird may be exhausted and hungry from a long flight—it needs to rest and eat. With care and common sense, birders can help protect the birds they love to watch.



Consider these points:

- Stay back from concentrations of nesting or resting waterbirds.
- Walk around groups of birds on the beach rather than forcing them to fly.
- Sit or crouch so that you appear smaller.
- Keep movements slow and steady, rather than fast or sporadic.
- If viewing from your car, stay inside as long as possible. It acts as a viewing “blind” and the birds are less likely to fly if they don’t recognize you as human. Never open and slam a car door!
- Stay on roads, trails and paths to minimize habitat disturbance.
- Do you occasionally use recordings to attract birds? If so, remember not to overuse them, or to try to attract rare or protected species. Avoid using recordings in heavily birded areas, and do not use them to attract birds during migration and the breeding season.
- Follow the [American Birding Association’s Code of Ethics](#) and share it with others. Be a good ambassador for birding by respecting wildlife and the rights of others.

Shorebird Survival Depends on You!

Summer is a busy time on Florida’s many beaches, and a vulnerable time for shorebirds. Many species of Florida’s water birds, including gulls, terns, skimmers, plovers, willets and oystercatchers, nest on the beach. When these beach-nesting birds are disturbed and flushed off their nests by people or dogs, eggs and chicks in the nests are exposed to temperature extremes and predators like crows, raccoons and dogs. It’s easy for unknowing beach goers to crush the eggs or kill young chicks accidentally, as both eggs and chicks blend in with their surroundings and are nearly invisible on the ground. As a general rule, stay the length of a football field away from groups of shorebirds, keep out of posted areas, avoid running your watercraft close to shore and keep dogs leashed.

Learn More

Tips on how, when, and where to view wildlife with FWC’s Wildlife Viewing Section:

<http://www.myfwc.com/viewing>

FWC’s Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail:

<http://www.floridabirdingtrail.com/>

Learn more about Florida’s habitats & wildlife by taking University of Florida’s Master Naturalist courses:

<http://www.masternaturalist.ifas.ufl.edu/>

Take the ‘Paddlers’ Environmental Toolkit Training’ with the Florida Paddling Trail Association:

<http://www.floridapaddlingtrails.com/>