

Protecting the West African Manatee

An Enormous Treasure

The West African Manatee, or *Trichechus senegalensis*, is an aquatic mammal that feeds in streams, lagoons and rivers and contributes to the regulation of the aquatic plant life in these waterways. The manatee is the source of many myths and legends and is the subject of some hunting rituals. It can reach 3 meters long and 500 kilograms in weight. The manatee can be found from the border zone between Mauritania and Senegal, as far south as Angola and as far east as Chad. It migrates, depending on the season, between rivers and waterways to feed and reproduce. This migration depends on water levels as well as salinity, though the manatee prefers waters that are calm (mid to low level zones of rivers, lakes, lagoons, flood plains and low coastal zones) and cold.



Manatee saved in Kanel, Senegal
(Olivier Borne)

Humans, The Lone Predators

Humans are the sole predator of the West African Manatee, hunted for consumption – its fat is considered to have medicinal value, its skin is used for making leather ropes. The manatee can be accidentally entrapped in fishing nets. However the biggest danger for this species is the disturbance (pollution and blockage) and destruction (reduction in area of mangrove forests, drought) of its habitat. Although it is protected, the species remains endangered due to legislation that is, in most countries, inefficient and poorly implemented. There are also significant efforts to be made towards the improvement of scientific information about the species, education and awareness of communities neighbouring its habitat. Wetlands International Africa, which has been working for a better future for this charismatic species for several years, is driving a process to bring together those initiatives that aim for better protection of the manatee and its habitat.



Manatee saved in Kanel, Senegal
(Wetlands International Africa)

Partnering to Save the Manatee

Under the PRCM umbrella, Wetlands International Africa brought together many international partners and led the development process of the manatee conservation strategy, with the support of the Abidjan Convention. More recently, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed by 15 countries under the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), which reinforces the efforts of Wetlands International Africa to protect this vulnerable species.

Together with PRCM partners and other organisations committed to the protection of the species in West and Central Africa, Wetlands International is implementing a program for the conservation of the manatee. Let's work together for the future our dear 'sea cow'!



Manatee saved at Navel, Sénégal
(Wetlands International Afrique)