

Species Spotlight

While Florida Manatees might be the cutest creatures you will see on ManaTV, they are not the only animals that call Blue Spring home. So let us take a minute to appreciate some other species you may see on our webcam!

Florida Spotted Gar

Florida Spotted Gar like to live in sandy-bottom fresh-water bodies with seagrass, which is plentiful in the St. Johns River. Therefore, it is common to find them swimming alongside snoozing manatees. These fish can grow to be up to 34 inches, so they are easy to spot with their long, narrow body and snout. Their elongated noses also help them to breathe in areas with low dissolved oxygen content. Florida Spotted Gar can use nares (nostrils) on top of their



snout, and a lung-like air bladder to breathe air at the surface. The water coming from the Blue Spring vent is low in oxygen, so this adaptation helps Spotted Gar breathe in the spring run. Although their eggs are poisonous, these abundant fish are an important food source for alligators and birds at Blue Spring. Look for their long, dark shapes from the above-water webcam, or for their spotted scales underwater.

American Alligator

Alligators are the only animals you will see in Blue Spring that can be as big as a manatee. Female alligators normally grow to be around 10 feet, but the longest male found in Florida was over 14 feet long! Sometimes called “living fossils,” alligators have not changed drastically over millions of years. They are actually more closely related to dinosaurs and birds than other reptiles. While these dinosaurs seem intimidating, they also face many dangers. Development of riparian areas



where alligators lay their eggs has made it difficult for them to find a secluded place to nest. Like manatees, alligators also use freshwater springs for warmth, so decreasing spring flows pose problems for this species.

- See [video of the American Alligator](#) from NOAA’s Estuary Education program.
- Listen to [sounds of the American Alligator](#) from *National Geographic*.

Snowy Egret

The beautiful, snowy-white feathers that make this type of heron so striking almost drove them to extinction in the early 1900s. Demand from designers that used Snowy Egret plumage for decoration in ladies' hats led to severe over hunting. However, thanks to some of Florida's earliest conservation laws, the Snowy Egret has made a great recovery. Today you can see these herons fishing in the shallows of Blue Spring. Instead of chasing after fish, egrets stand still and wait for dinner to swim to them. Then they lunge, scooping up the fish with their long beak, and swallow their prey whole! If you are lucky, you might be able to see the males "dancing" in the spring. They flap their wings, splash the water, and show off their best moves to attract a mate. It is impressive display, and watching it leaves no doubt that these birds are more beautiful alive than as a fashion statement.

- See [video of the Snowy Egret](#) from ARKive.
- Listen to [Snowy Egret sounds](#) from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's *All About Birds*.



Red-Eared Slider

These popular turtles are very cute, which is what led to them becoming a problem in Blue Spring and other waterways around Florida. They are an exotic, invasive species, which means they are not naturally found in Florida and cause problems for native turtles. Brought to Florida as pets, people dumped these turtles into waterways when they no longer wanted them. Now they are common in Blue Spring. Red-Eared Sliders out-compete Florida's native turtles, like the Loggerhead Musk Turtle or the Florida Cooter, for resources. You can help protect Florida's native species from invasives by being a responsible pet owner, filling your garden with Florida native plants, and learning about invasive species in your area.

- See [video of a Red-Eared Slider](#) from ExpertVillage.



Works Cited

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