

# MANATEE IN MOBILE BAY, ALABAMA

## The Proverbial "Needle In A Haystack"

Unusually warm weather in Mobile Bay, AL, in late October and early November probably caused a visiting manatee to linger too long in bay waters instead of returning to the warmer waters of Florida. Although manatees are concentrated in Florida year-round, some manatees range as far north as the Carolinas and as far west as Louisiana in the summer. As many of you already know, when water temperatures drop below 68 degrees, manatees can become cold stressed. Prolonged exposure to cold can result in the manatee's death.

After the successful rescue of Chessie, the wayward manatee rescued in September in the Chesapeake Bay, we watched events unfold in Alabama with anticipation of yet another rescue attempt, and dread, as rescues are very difficult and sometimes dangerous, and they must be well coordinated.

Dr. Gerald Regan, Alabama coordinator for the Southeastern Marine Mammal Stranding Network, and Bill Kimmy, an SMC volunteer, coordinated with the Club and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) to mount a rescue of this illusive manatee. First, Regan and Kimmy monitored sightings of the manatee and conducted several boat surveys to pinpoint the manatee's whereabouts. Throughout November, sightings were called in, but when Regan and

Kimmy investigated them, none led to the manatee. Finally, in early December, Bob Quarles, an officer with the USFWS's Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge in Florida, chartered a Cessna plane and, flying low over Mobile Bay, searched for any signs of the manatee — unsuccessfully. "We were all very hopeful we would find the manatee," commented Kimmy, "and very disappointed when we didn't."

Because there have been no sightings since late November, we hope the manatee headed south and is doing fine along Florida's Gulf Coast. In the cold winter of 1992, another manatee was sighted in Mobile Bay. A rescue attempt was made, but it was unsuccessful, and eventually the manatee was found dead.

Kudos to Dr. Regan and Bill Kimmy for all their hard work in coordinating this rescue attempt. Kimmy also got permission to post SMC's public awareness signs around the bay and acted as liaison between Club staff and others. Many thanks to Club member Julie Merchant and Sean O'Hare, Dr. Regan's assistant, who also helped. Finally, thanks to the USFWS for their efforts during this rescue attempt.

*Please consider making a donation at this time to our newly established Emergency Rescue Fund. Simply make your check payable to Save the Manatee® Club — Emergency Rescue Fund. Thanks, as always, for your assistance!*

## Tragic News From Blue Spring *continued from page 1*

boat and not by the boat's propellers.

Boomer had 5,512 adoptive parents, and SMC staff has already notified them about his death. Of those adoptive parents, 1,278 were school classes. Children, in particular, were especially fond of Boomer. "We are all mourning the loss of Boomer," said Judith Vallee, executive director of SMC. "His death is so senseless. But this is the reality of how dangerous a manatee's life is — this is why Save the Manatee® Club continues to fight for manatee protection. Until we make waterways safer for manatees, they will continue to die."

"Boomer was killed in Putnam County, which has no plans to develop manatee boat speed

zones with the state to protect manatees from speeding and careless boaters," added Vallee.

"Boomer's death was preventable, and it is why every waterway that manatees use should be regulated to protect them from being killed and maimed. The state must not stop developing protective boat speed rules once the initial "key" county rules have been adopted."

The last manatee in the Club's adoption program to be killed by a boat was another popular manatee named Sweetgums in 1991. Her death resulted in an emergency speed zone rule for most parts of the St. Johns River and a three-year struggle to ensure that the most protective long term measures were adopted by the state.



## Take Action!

Please don't let Boomer's death be in vain. Get mad and let your legislators hear from you. Call or write your legislators in Washington and demand they support reauthorization of a strong Endangered Species Act (see addresses and phone numbers on page 2).

Call or write Florida Governor Lawton Chiles and demand he do everything in his power to make the state's waterways safer for manatees and copy your letter to Virginia Wetherell, Secretary of FDEP (see addresses and phone numbers on page 6). Tell them you want:

- more on-water law enforcement officers.
- a boat operator's license.
- a maximum statewide boat speed limit on all waters of the state that manatees frequent.
- a drastically reduced lapse time between adoption of a boat speed rule and the posting of the regulatory signs so the speed zones can be enforced.
- manatee protection boat speed zones in all counties that manatees frequent.

Thank you.

## UPDATE ON CHESSIE: "HE'S A TRAVELING MAN(ATEE)"

Chessie, the wayward manatee, who was recently rescued in Maryland and released in Florida, has not ceased his wandering ways. In three short months he lost his tag, got a new tag, traveled south, traveled north...and traveled south again!

Members will remember that, after being rescued from the cold waters of the Chesapeake Bay, Chessie was flown home to Florida. He was then tagged with a transmitter and released into the wild on October 7, 1994, at the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge near Cape Canaveral, FL.

Chessie was fitted with a manatee tracking device, which is a four-foot long, flexible nylon tether that connects a floating transmitter to a belt which fits snugly around the base of the manatee's tail. Several weak links have been designed into the assembly which allow the manatee to break free if it becomes entangled on an object.

According to Jim Valade, Assistant Manatee Coordinator with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and team leader of Chessie's rescue in Maryland, Chessie lost his transmitter within the first two weeks after his release in October. In mid January, however, staff biologists from the National Biological Survey, Sirenia Project in Gainesville, FL, were down at the Port Everglades Power Plant photographing manatees who were basking in the warm water outflow. They saw a manatee with a belt on and were able to identify Chessie (the belts are numbered and color-coded) and clip another transmitter on.

Since being re-tagged in mid-January, Chessie has been on the move. Between January 18 and 25, Chessie moved north to Jupiter, FL from the Port Everglades Power Plant (about 60 miles). On January 25, he was in Jupiter Inlet, moving south rapidly, and on January 26, he was in Boca Raton, FL — a distance of about 40 miles from Jupiter. Researchers speculate that once Chessie arrived in Jupiter, water temperatures probably started dropping, and this may have prompted his trip south. All we can say is, he sure is building up those frequent swimmer miles! We can't wait to see where he heads to this summer.

### Florida Members:

If you see a tagged manatee, please call the location in to the Florida Marine Patrol by using the Manatee Hotline Number — 1-800-DIAL-FMP.