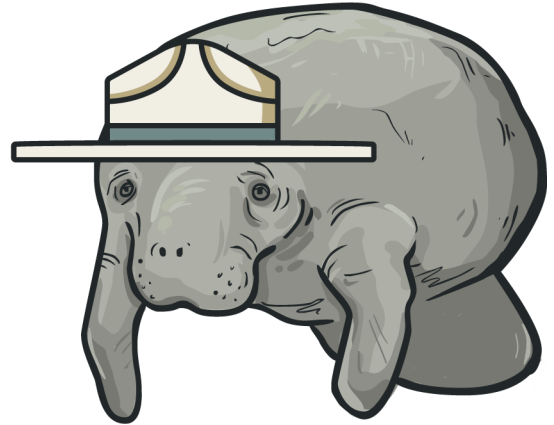




What to expect:

In this unit, you will learn about four of Florida's coolest critters. At the beginning of each activity, click or tap the picture of the animal to open their fact sheet and coloring page.



Every activity in this unit will challenge you to apply what you've learned about critter behavior at home. The time

required to complete the activities will vary. Be creative and have fun!

What you'll need:

- [Adobe Reader](#)
- Pillows and blankets
- Tape measure or ruler
- Celery, nut butter, and dried fruit
- Stopwatch
- Blindfold

What to do:

1. Complete the [CORE UNIT](#).
2. Learn about some cool critters.
3. Play some fun games.
4. Get your prizes!



Get Digital Prizes:

Once you complete the Critter Unit Survey, you will be emailed an Accomplishment Package. This will include exclusive Virtual Junior Rangers digital content.



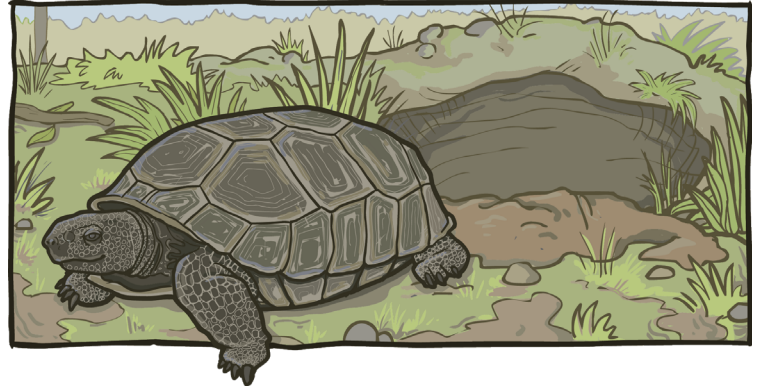
BURROW BUILDERS

Name _____ Date _____

Where are you doing this activity? _____

Get to know the gopher tortoise!

Gopher tortoises got their name because they live in underground burrows. These amazing burrows can be **40 feet long** and **10 feet deep**!



Gopher tortoises live in dry, sandy environments that experience fires.

In these communities, fire is natural and beneficial. Plants and animals who live here have adapted to thrive in fire, and some plants even require fire to release their seeds!

When the land is too hot and dry or a fire is spreading through the grasses, the burrow is a safe and cool place for other animals to relax.

Watch the video and then answer the question below



How does fire benefit the gopher tortoise? _____

*Always remember to ask an adult before accessing the internet and using social media.

The gopher tortoise is known as a **keystone species**. A keystone species is an animal that many other species rely on for survival. In fact, scientists estimate that over 350 different animals will use gopher tortoise burrows!

Click or tap on the picture to color a sandhill. Identify the animals from the community set that match the descriptions below.

1. This plant shares a name with the tortoise. It's also one of their favorite snacks!

2. This slithery critter frequently uses the tortoise burrows.



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JUNIOR RANGER
WHAT'S NEXT

Get ready to channel your inner gopher tortoise!

To be a gopher tortoise in its burrow, gather blankets and pillows and build a pillow fort in your home. Be sure to ask for help from an adult. You can use furniture like chairs and beds for support, then drape the blankets over. Use pillows to add walls and extra comfort. Get creative and decorate your burrow however you like.

When everything is set up just right, use your measuring tape to measure your burrow.

How tall is your burrow? _____ feet

How long is your burrow? _____ feet

How many people could fit inside? _____





FEATHERED FAMILIES

Name _____ Date _____

Where are you doing this activity? _____

Say hey to the scrub jay!

Florida scrub jays live in scrub communities. They are **endemic** to Florida, meaning you can't find them anywhere else in the world!

They live in family units that include parents, older siblings and baby birds. The whole family works together to find food and guard their territory from predators.

Scrub jays need protection from people, too. Most of their homes have been changed or completely removed to make space for people. Park Rangers and scientists work very hard to learn more about scrub jays and restore the homes they lost.



Match the characters below with their role in protecting scrub jay families by choosing the correct letter. One example has been done for you.

- A. Scrub jay parents _____ Restore scrub jay habitat.
- B. Scrub jay siblings D Learn about scrub jays and share what you know.
- C. Park Rangers _____ Build nests for the baby birds.
- D. YOU! _____ Find food and watch for danger.

*Always remember to ask an adult before accessing the internet and using social media.



With up to eight members in a family, scrub jays have a lot of mouths to feed. So they eat a variety of foods plentiful in their scrub communities, such as nuts, insects and berries.

You might not think bugs sound very tasty, but the recipe below will have you eating like a jay with edible "ants!"

ANTS ON A LOG

Materials

Plate
Butter knife

Preparation

1. Wash celery and cut into 3 inch pieces.
2. Use the butter knife to spread peanut or sunflower seed butter in the hollow side of the celery sticks to make your "logs."
3. Place dried fruit and berries on top of nut butter to make "ants."

Ingredients

1. Celery
2. Your favorite nut butter
3. Raisins or other dried fruit



WHAT'S NEXT

Scrub jays know how important it is to help their family.

Be like the scrub jay and help prepare a meal for your family. Ask an adult how you can help them cook dinner. Or for an easy snack, you can use the Ants on a Log recipe provided above.

What meal did you make for your family? _____

List two other ways you could help out around your home.

1. _____

2. _____



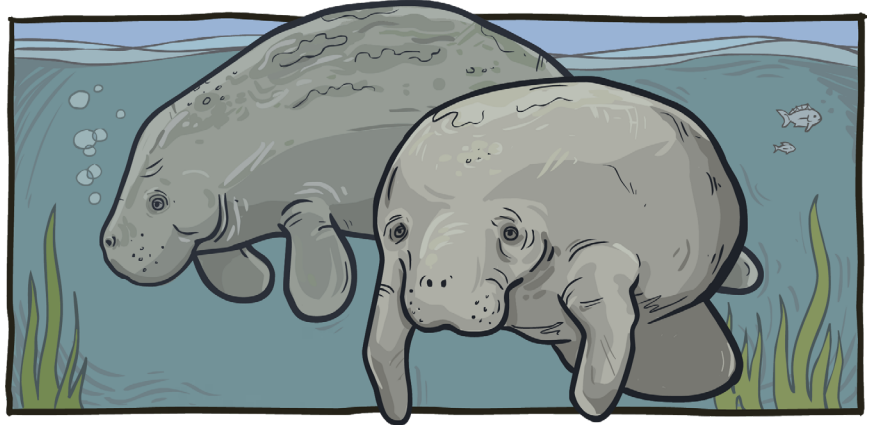
TEMPERATURE TRAVELERS

Name _____ Date _____

Where are you doing this activity? _____

Meet the manatee!

Manatees are marine mammals. They live their whole life in water, munching on aquatic plants. Manatees don't like the cold, so they love hanging out around Florida!

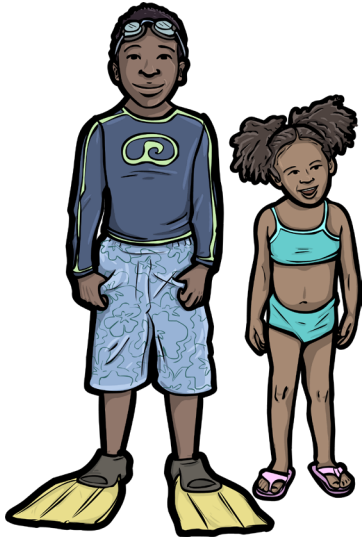


Manatees are an indicator

species. Indicator species are animals that scientists use to predict the health of the whole ecosystem. Because manatees share habitat with many smaller critters, by protecting them we can keep the whole community safe too!

Watch the video below to learn about manatees. Then answer the questions on the next page.





What temperature are Florida's springs? _____ °F

What is the best time of year to see a manatee in Florida State Parks? _____

What is a way we can protect manatees while we're swimming?

Can't get enough manatees? [Click here](#) to watch the manatee webcam and highlight reel!



WHAT'S NEXT

Just like manatees need to find warm places to survive, pay attention to temperature to play this game.

HOT AND COLD GAME

What You'll Need:

- At least 2 players
- A stopwatch
- A small item to hide

Where to Play:

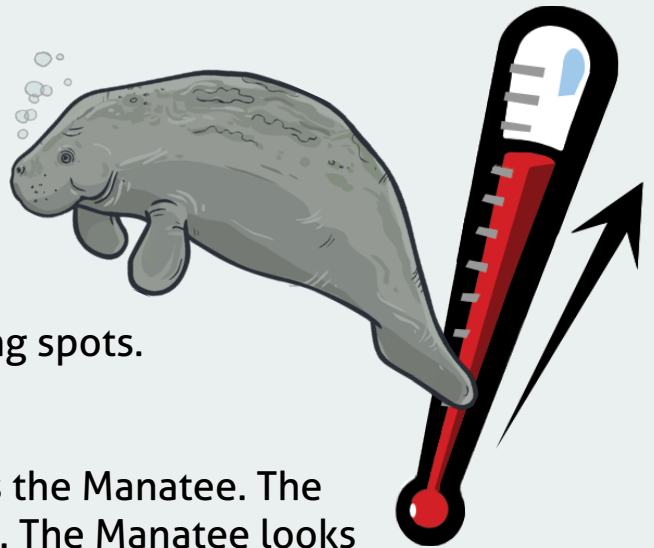
Somewhere you can move around with hiding spots.

Rules:

One person is the Hider and the other one is the Manatee. The Hider places the item in a secret hiding spot. The Manatee looks for the item by listening to temperature clues from the Hider. Say "Cold" and "Colder" when the Manatee is moving away from the item, and say "Warmer" and "Just Right" as the Manatee gets closer to the item. Use a stopwatch to see how long it takes the Manatee to find the item.

How long did it take you to find the item? _____ minutes

Now you know what it's like for manatees to take their cues from the temperature! Can you beat your time? Try switching roles and play again.





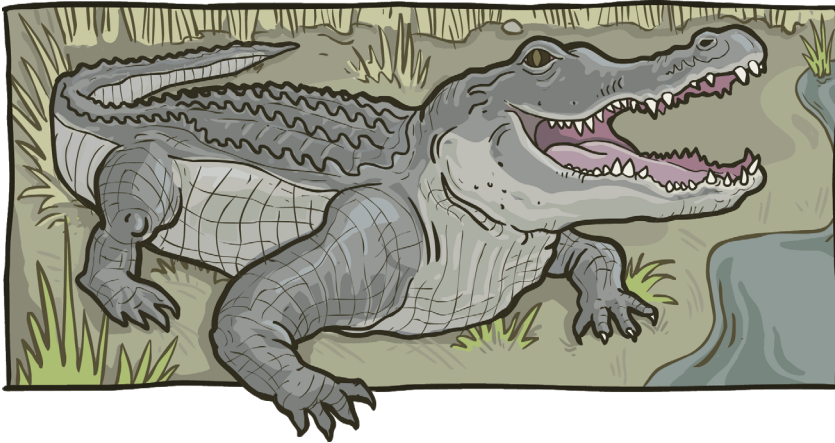
GATOR VIBES

Name _____ Date _____

Where are you doing this activity? _____

Introducing the American alligator!

Alligators live in fresh water habitats. They are the **top predators** in their communities. Predators are important because they keep everything in balance. Without predators, there would be too many prey. Prey, such as fish and other animals would eat all the plants. Without plants, no one would have what they need to survive.



Alligators have been around since the time of the dinosaurs. However, due to over-hunting, they almost disappeared from the earth. Now laws are in place to protect them.

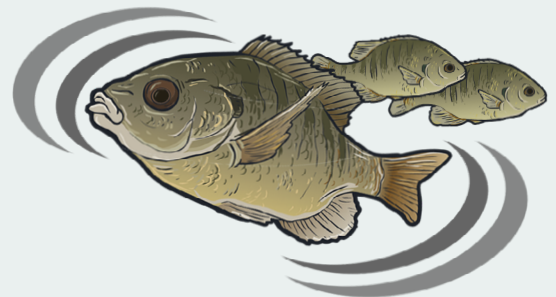
Alligators have a special way of hunting prey. They use vibrations.

Alligators do not need to see their food to know it is there.

When prey move in or near the water, they create small ripples. Alligators have specialized ears inside their head and sensory organs around their face that help them make sense of the vibrations, so they can tell the difference between prey and non-prey items like falling sticks. This special sense helps alligators find food, even in the dark!

Name your five senses.

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____



Click the boxes to check off the sense or senses you use to find food.

*Always remember to ask an adult before accessing the internet and using social media.



Can you identify objects without seeing them like an alligator?

Have a friend or family member pick three random objects from around your home. Put on a blindfold while they collect the items. One at a time, feel the objects without seeing them and then guess what they are. Take off the blindfold and see how you did!

How many objects were you able to correctly guess? _____

Which object was the hardest to guess? _____

What made it difficult?

It is difficult to identify objects without sight! Throwing trash or food into a alligator's habitat can create vibrations and confuse them. They might accidentally eat things that make them sick.



WHAT'S NEXT

Congratulations! You've completed Virtual Junior Ranger Unit 2: Cool Critters!

All of the animals you learned about need our help to keep their communities healthy. Below are simple things you can do to protect Florida wildlife as a Virtual Junior Ranger.

SERVE. Never feed wildlife, even by accident. Dispose of trash and recyclables correctly.

PROTECT. Getting too close will scare a wild animal, so keep yourself and wildlife safe by always watching from a distance.

SHARE. Tell others about Florida's cool critters and how to keep them safe.



Complete the [Cool Critters Unit Survey](#) to get your digital prizes.

