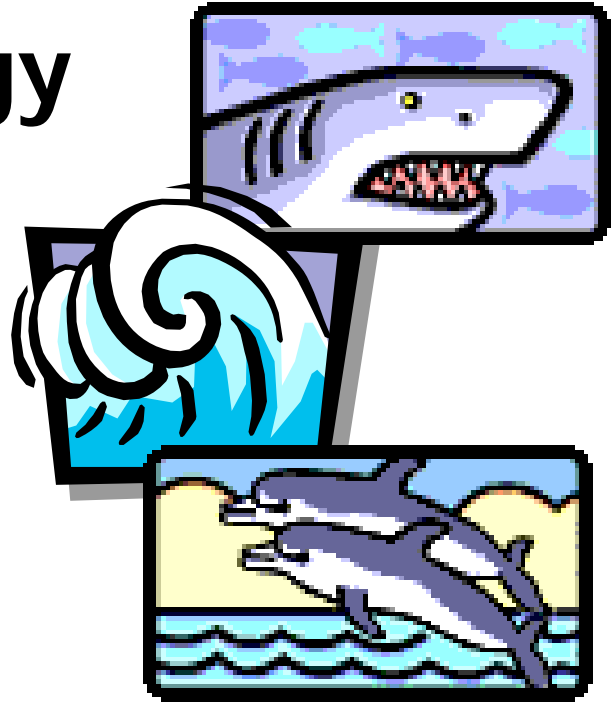


**Florida 4-H Youth  
Development Program**

**4-H State  
Marine Ecology  
Event**



**SPECIES  
IDENTIFICATION  
COMPANION GUIDE**

**Junior Version**

**Revised 3/09**

**Developed by**

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April 2007  
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## Florida 4-H State Marine Ecology Event

# SPECIES IDENTIFICATION COMPANION GUIDE

Developed by  
Karen Blyler, 4-H Marine and Environmental Education Coordinator

### About the 4-H State Marine Ecology Event (MEE)

The MEE is a statewide competition for Florida's 4-H youth. Counties can enter teams and/or individuals. They compete in five different sections of the Event. These sections are plant identification, invertebrate identification, vertebrate identification, a natural history scavenger hunt, and a multiple choice test on ecosystems and issues.

Guidelines, rules, registration forms, date and location for the event, and additional study materials can be obtained by going to Florida 4-H website: <http://florida4h.org>

### How to Use the Companion Guide

The first three sections of the contest require youth to correctly identify selected plants and animals found along Florida's coast. Photos and/or drawings of these animals can be found in the MEE Species Identification Guide CD. The "Companion Guide" supplements the CD and provides identifying features and/or characteristics for the organisms youth are expected to know. (Note: Youth do not need to know any scientific names. They are listed only to help clarify the identity of the organism since many can have more than one common name.)

Interesting facts about some of the organisms are provided in "*Did You Know?*" This information provides the content for Section 4 of the MEE - the "Natural History Scavenger Hunt." Please note that not all organisms will have this information. For the "scavenger hunt" youth will be given a sheet of "clues." They will need to use these clues to find appropriate matches from specimens or photos provided. Sample "clue" sheets may be found on the 4-H Marine Ecology Event website (go to "state events") at <http://florida4h.org>

Youth should refer to the Companion Guide while viewing the CD or during field trips to coastal habitats (if this is possible). Youth can quiz each other on the identity of the organisms or on the natural history information. Youth can even make up their own clue sheets or use the photos in the CD to create practice sessions for Sections 1, 2, 3, and 4 of the MEE. A pdf of the Species Identification Guide can be downloaded off the 4-H website. GOOD LUCK!



## Section 1: Marine and Coastal Plant Identification

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**Algae/Seaweed** - *Did you know?* These marine plants lack true roots, stems, and leaves. However, like plants on land, seaweeds are very important because they produce food and oxygen through photosynthesis. (\* Indicates small revision/addition.)

### **Sea lettuce** (*Ulva lactuca*)\*

*How to identify:* This green seaweed grows in paper-thin sheets that are flat or ruffled.

*Did you know?* It is usually found on rocky bottoms and coral reefs. It is an edible seaweed and is sometimes added to salads or dried for seasoning.

### **Sargassum weed** (*Sargassum sp.*)

*How to identify:* This brown seaweed is also known as gulfweed. It is golden brown in color and easily identified by its little round air or gas bladders that help keep it afloat. *Did you know?* Sargassum weed forms large floating mats of seaweed at the surface of the ocean. These mats provide shelter for many sea creatures both big and small. This seaweed also may be found floating in the surf zone at the beach (or washed up on shore). If you collect any, shake it out in a bucket and see if there is something living in it!

### **Red algae** (*Gracilaria sp.*)

*How to identify:* This is a bushy but "graceful" looking red seaweed. It can be greenish, grayish, or purplish red. It has slender and pointed tips. *Did you know?* This alga is grown in aquaculture facilities both as a food source for some marine animals, but also for a chemical compound that it produces which is used to thicken products like ice cream and toothpaste!

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**Seagrasses** - *Did you know?* These marine plants are important because they serve as nursery grounds and a food source for many marine animals. Unlike algae, they have true roots, stems, leaves, and flowers. Sea grasses are generally found in shallow, clear waters.

### **Manatee grass** (*Syringodium filiforme*)

*How to identify:* This grass has blades that are round like spaghetti. *Did you know?* Manatees like to eat it. This is the second most common seagrass in Florida.

### **Turtle grass** (*Thalassia testudinum*)

*How to identify:* It has blades that are flat, ribbon-like (about 1 cm wide), and longer than other seagrasses. Each blade can grow to up to 14 inches long! *Did you know?* It is the most common seagrass. Green sea turtles graze on it.

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**Marsh plants** – *Did you know?* Some marshes are dominated by trees, like mangroves, others are dominated by marsh grasses, like *Spartina* and *Juncus*. In southern coastal areas of Florida, one is more likely to see mangrove marshes/swamps while in northern coastal areas, marsh grasses will dominate.

### **Sawgrass** (*Cladium jamaicense*)

*How to identify:* The blades of this marsh grass have serrated edges, giving it the name sawgrass. *Did you know?* It is found throughout the Everglades in swampy areas and brackish water marshes.

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### **Smooth cord grass (*Spartina alterniflora*)**

*How to identify:* This plant has broad flat, dark green leaves. It is usually found at the seaward edge of a salt marsh.

### **Salt meadow cord grass (*Spartina patens*)**

*How to identify:* This is a wiry grass that is smaller and more delicate looking than other marsh grasses. The leaves are slender with the edges rolled together so it appears to be round but it's really not! If you push gently on the tip of the leaf, it will bend.

### **Needle rush (*Juncus roemerianus*)**

*How to identify:* This plant has round stems with sharp tips. Dead stems look dark gray. It can grow up to 2 meters tall! It often grows mixed in with smooth cord grass, but is taller and darker than cord grass.

### **Southern glasswort (*Salicornia virginica*)**

*How to identify:* The stems of this plant can appear red in color and are somewhat round, fleshy, and segmented. *Did you know? This plant is edible but tastes quite salty! Some say it tastes like pickles!*

### **Sea oxeye or Sea daisy (*Borrichia frutescens*)**

*How to identify:* This is a bushy plant with single yellow flowers at the end of stiff, compact branches. The leaves of this plant are often silvery and hairy.

### **Red mangrove (*Rhizophora mangle*)**

*How to identify:* The red mangrove can be found growing close to the water. This mangrove is distinguished by its reddish prop roots. The leaves are shiny, dark green and have smooth edges. Seeds sprout on the tree and form long pencil shaped structures called propagules. *Did you know? The prop roots can trap sediment and provide a place for marine life to grow on as well as shelter for them to hide. The red mangrove is also called the "walking tree" because the long prop roots make it look like the tree has legs! The propagules fall off the tree into the water and float straight up and down until they sink and root themselves in the bottom.*

### **Black mangrove (*Avicennia germinans*)**

*How to identify:* The black mangrove tree can be distinguished by having dark, stick-like roots that can grow up out of the soil. Leaves are darker on top with lighter undersides. Leaves have salt crystals on their surface. The seeds are lima-bean shaped. *Did you know? The roots are called "pneumatophores" and they allow the black mangrove tree to get air even when the roots are covered by water.*

### **White mangrove (*Laguncularia racemosa*)**

*How to identify:* This tree is usually found higher in elevation than black or red mangroves (farther from water's edge). The leaves are yellow-green and broad. There are two glands at the base of each leaf. These glands excrete salt. There may be a notch at the top of the leaf. Seeds are small, almond shaped. The small flowers are white.

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**Beach plants** – *Did you know? These plants are often found on coastal sandy areas and/or dunes.*

### **Sea oats (*Uniola paniculata*)**

*How to identify:* This is a tall, erect grass with slender leaves that form narrow tips. It has a well-developed seed-head. *Did you know? This plant is important because it helps keep a dune in place by holding the sand particles together with its long roots. In fact, the roots may be up to 30 feet long!*

### **Railroad vine or Goats Foot Morning Glory (*Ipomoea pes-caprae*)**

*How to identify:* This vine runs along the ground. Its flower is bright pinkish purple. It is also known as goat's foot morning glory because of the notch in the leaf.

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### **Sea grape (*Coccoloba uvifera*) *NEW!***

*How to identify:* The sea grape is a small tree with big round, stiff leaves that can grow up to 10 inches across. The seeds grow in long clusters. *Did you know? The fruits can be made into jelly!*

### **Sea purslane (*Sesuvium portulacastrum*)**

*How to identify:* This sprawling plant has thick fleshy leaves with small star-shaped pink flowers. *Did you know? It is edible but tastes quite salty!*

### **Firewheel or Indian blanket (*Gaillardia pulchella*)**

*How to identify:* This plant is easy to identify by its single flower that is brick red with yellow tipped petals. The leaves are rather fuzzy or hairy and elongated.

### **Dune (or beach) Sunflower (*Helianthus debilis*)**

*How to identify:* This plant has rough, alternate leaves. It can grow to 4 ft. tall but one foot tall is more common. Look for the bright yellow flowers with dark maroon centers.

### **Prickly pear cactus (*Opuntia compressa*)**

*How to identify:* This cactus is identified by its round, fleshy stems. It has both long and short spines. When ripe, the fruit is a bright purple color. *Did you know? Although the fruits are edible, they are difficult to pick as even the fruit has tufts of thin, sharp spines! Be careful when touching this plant!*

### **Cabbage palm (*Sabal palmetto*)**

*How to identify:* It has a gray tan trunk with a crown of large fan-like leaves. *Did you know? It is the state tree of Florida!*

### **Sand Bur or sandspur (*Cenchrus tribuloides*)**

*How to identify:* This grass has small round burs that resist removal from clothing and skin. *Did you know? It's good because it helps hold the dune together. It's bad because it hurts when you step on one or have to pull them off your clothing or skin!*

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**Introduced Coastal Plants – *Did you know? These plants came to Florida from somewhere else. They are also called invasive plants because they easily spread and crowd out native plants (and animals), thus harming the balance of the ecosystem.***

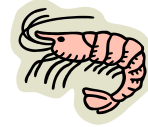
### **Australian pine (*Casuarina spp.*)**

*How to identify:* It has dark green needle-like, segmented twigs around 5 inches in length. The cones are like brown little balls. *Did you know? It is not a true pine tree. They were introduced as coastal windbreaks. These trees grow rapidly and their "needles" release a chemical into soil that prevents other plants from growing there.*

### **Brazilian pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolius*)**

*How to identify:* This is a small tree that can grow up to 30 feet tall. Leaves are 1-2 inches long. The flowers are white. The fruits grow in clusters and go from green to bright red. *Did you know? The fruits of this plant are ripe (red) around Christmas time, which is why some people call it the "Florida holly." The poisonous sap and red berries of the tree can cause human health problems. Leaves can smell like turpentine when crushed. Brazilian pepper is related to poison ivy, so people who are allergic to poison ivy should avoid this plant*

## Section 2: Marine & Coastal Invertebrates Identification



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**Poriferans (sponges)** – *Did you know?* Sponges may not look like animals, but they are! They have many pores or openings where water goes in (ostia) and where water goes out (osculum). Sponges are filter feeders. They collect food from the water as it moves through their body. Many small marine animals take advantage of this and seek shelter in the holes and canals of the sponge. Sponges grow attached to the seafloor. Sponges are found around coral reefs, sea grass beds, on mangrove roots, etc. (\* Indicates revision/change has been made.)

**Tube sponge (*Callyspongia* sp.) *NEW!***

*How to identify:* This sponge looks like a cluster of tubes growing upward. It is drab (brown/gray) in color. Individual tubes may grow to 3 feet in height and 2 inches across the opening on top.

**Basket sponge (*Hircinia canaliculate*)**

*How to identify:* As its name implies it is shaped like a basket. It is rough to touch.

**Sheepswool sponge (*Hippospongia lachne*)**

*How to identify:* This sponge has an irregular shape and is softer than most other sponges. *Did you know?* This sponge has great commercial importance because of the softness of its skeleton. Because of this it is harvested for use as a natural “bath sponge.”

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**Cnidarians** – *Did you know?* This group includes jellyfish, corals, sea anemones, and man-o-wars. These animals have radial symmetry and tentacles with stinging cells that help them capture food. Some build a hard calcareous skeleton around their body (like corals), while others (like jellyfish) don't. To avoid confusion, many scientists now refer to jellyfish as “jellies” because they are not fish.

**Portuguese Man-of-War (*Physalia physalia*)**

*How to identify:* Look for the bluish balloon-like float and long tentacles. You may either see it floating in the water or washed up on the shore. *Did you know?* This is not a “jellyfish” but actually a whole colony of animals called hydrozoans. The animals are on the tentacles that hang down below the float. *Warning:* Some tentacles grow very long (up to 33 feet!) and can really hurt if you come in contact with any of them. Do NOT touch it if you see it washed up on shore and stay clear of it in the water.

**Common (moon) jelly (*Aurelia aurelia*)**

*How to identify:* The gonads (reproductive organs) of this jellyfish form a purple 4-leaf-clover-like shape in the middle of the bell. *Did you know?* The moon jelly is harmless to most people, although some people report a mild reaction to touching moon jellies.

**Sea whip (*Leptogorgia* sp.)**

*How to identify:* This is a type of soft coral. It can grow up to 36” high. It is a colony of many animals. When alive it can be purple, red, yellow-orange, or tan. Its branches are long and whip-like. It grows attached to rocks or other solid structures on the sea floor. *Did you know?* It can be found on rocky bottoms, coral reefs. It is generally found in calm areas on the back side of reefs.

**Sea fan (*Gorgonia* sp.) *NEW!***

*How to identify:* This is a type of soft coral. Sea fans are flattened and have a net-like appearance. They can be pink, purple, or even yellow. *Did you know?* It can be found on rocky bottoms, coral reefs. It

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*is generally found in calm areas on the back side of reefs. Sea fans are oriented with the widest side facing into the current (more surface area). This helps them filter more water and collect more food.*

### **Giant (pink-tipped) sea anemone (*Condylactus gigantean*)**

*How to identify:* This sea anemone has light colored or white tentacles with pink/purple tips. ***Did you know?*** *These sea anemones can have symbiotic shrimp that hide among the tentacles. They are found around coral reefs or in shallow seagrass beds.*

### **Brain coral (*Diploria labyrinthiformis*)**

*How to identify:* This hard coral can form very large clumps that are 6-8 feet across. It is called brain coral because it has deep winding curves like our brain. ***Did you know?*** *This coral is found on the fore reef (toward the front) and helps break down the wave energy that hits the reef.*

### **Elkhorn coral (*Acropora palmate*)**

*How to identify:* This hard coral has a treelike appearance but with flat branches that resemble the horns of a moose (Ok, so why didn't they call it moose horn coral instead?) It is brownish yellow with lighter tips. ***Did you know?*** *It grows on exposed areas of the coral reef and can be closer to the waters' surface than many other corals.*

### **Staghorn coral (*Acropora cervicornis*)**

*How to identify:* This brownish yellow coral has round branches that form tight clusters with pointed tips. The coral mass can grow up to 5 feet high or take on a sprawling form. ***Did you know?*** *It can be found in more protected areas of the reef.*

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**Annelid worms** – ***Did you know?*** *These are segmented worms that live in the ocean. Some are able to move around and hunt for food (like bristle worms) while others must stay in one place and build a tube around themselves and/or burrow in sand or mud for protection. These "worms in a tube" must collect food when it "floats" by them.*

### **Bristle worm (*Hermodice sp. or Eurythoe sp.*)**

*How to identify:* Bristle worms are segmented worms that have many fine spines along the sides of their long body that are sharp as glass wool. They can be greenish to orange-yellow in color. They can be 4-10 inches long depending on the species. ***Did you know?*** *They should NOT be handled with bare hands. The spines are very difficult to remove from fingers! They are good predators on small marine life. Some types will even bite on a hook! They can be found around reefs, sand/mud, and in sea grass beds.*

### **Christmas tree worm (*Spirobranchus giganteus*)**

*How to identify:* This is a showy worm when you can see it. It can be seen on the surface of dead or living coral. It forms a tube down into the coral. ***Did you know?*** *It is very light sensitive and will quickly go down in its tube when something passes over it. It is found in coral reefs.*

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**Molluscs** – ***Did you know?*** *These animals have a shell-producing gland called a mantle, but not all molluscs produce a shell. Most have a muscular foot and a rasping tongue called a radula. This "tongue" helps the animal feed.*

### **Limpet**

*How to identify:* This mollusk has a single "volcano" shaped shell. Many types of limpets have holes on the top (a.k.a. "keyhole"). ***Did you know?*** *They are found attached to rocks in intertidal areas.*

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### **Bay scallop (*Aequipecten irradians*)**

*How to identify:* Scallops are identified by their wider hinge area (sometimes called “ears”). They are often gray-brown in color. The lower valve (shell) is usually lighter than the upper valve. ***Did you know?*** *When you eat scallops you are actually eating the adductor muscles that open and close the shell.*

### **Atlantic ribbed mussel (*Geukensia demissa*)**

*How to identify:* These bivalves can be recognized by their “ribs” that line the surface of their shell. They attach themselves to marsh grasses or other solid underwater objects with strong byssus threads. ***Did you know?*** *They are found in the intertidal areas/creeks of salt marshes.*

### **Pen shell (*Atrina rigida*) **NEW!****

*How to identify:* This shell is thin but long and brownish in color. The inside of the shell is usually a beautiful mother of pearl. It is wide on one end and narrow on the other. It's often found with the wide end sticking up out of the sand. The edges of its shell can be sharp, so be careful! ***Did you know?*** *The pen shell gets its name because its shape is like an old fashion quill (feather) pen.*

### **Eastern oyster (*Crassostrea virginica*)**

*How to identify:* This shell is often rough and heavy looking at the surface but variable in the way it is shaped. The inside is often white except for the purplish area of the muscle scar. ***Did you know?*** *Oyster reefs are ecologically important because they provide a home for many animals such as mud crabs, barnacles, worms, shrimp, etc. Oysters are filter feeders.*

### **Sunray venus (*Macrocallista nimbosa*)**

*How to identify:* This bivalve has a longer than average shell. It is usually shiny and smooth. It is mostly lavender gray with radial markings that extend out from the hinge/umbo area.

### **Giant Atlantic cockle (*Dinocardium robustum*)**

*How to identify:* This shell has radial ribs extending from its narrow end. It can be quite large and heavy. The inside of the shell is often pink-rose in color and more pale or white at margin. Small cockles are often mistaken for scallops, but they do not have the “ears” around the hinge like a scallop does.

### **Coquina clam (*Donax variabilis*)**

*How to identify:* These shells can range in color from white to yellow, to purple and even deep red. Their shells can have ray or even plaid patterns. ***Did you know?*** *These small colorful clams make their home on Florida's sandy beaches. They burrow in the sand between waves and are eaten by birds, crabs, etc.*

### **Florida horse conch (*Pleuroploca gigantea*)**

*How to identify:* This large gastropod is actually not a conch but more related to tulip shells. They can be identified by their large size, and orange flesh/shell color. ***Did you know?*** *They can be found in grass flats or sandy/mud flat areas. The horse conch is a voracious predator that preys on other snails. It is also the official state shell of Florida!*

### **Florida crown conch (*Melongena corona*)**

*How to identify:* This conch can easily be distinguished by its “crown” of spines on its “shoulder.” It may vary in color – but brownish gray is common. ***Did you know?*** *It is commonly found on mud flats around mangroves and oyster beds. It is a predatory snail, using its radula and acidic saliva to drill holes into other mollusks so it can eat them!*

### **Pink or Queen conch (*Strombus gigas*)**

*How to identify:* This famous gastropod is noted for its beautiful pink color inside the shell. All true conchs have a notch on the lower part of their “lip.” ***Did you know?*** *Although protected in many parts of the world (including FL), this conch is sought after for its meat, which is used to make conch chowder. It is found on sand bottoms and seagrass beds in south Florida.*

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### **Banded tulip (*Fasciolaria hunteria*)**

*How to identify:* This tulip shell can be distinguished from other tulips by its thin, dark spiral rings and lighter color. ***Did you know?*** *It is found in seagrass beds and sandy/mud bottoms of bay or coastal waters. Tulip snails prey on other snails for food.*

### **Atlantic moon snail or Shark's eye (*Polinices duplicatus*)**

*How to identify:* This gastropod is known for its very large "foot." This foot can almost cover its shell when the animal is on the move. They "plow" through the sand/mud feeding on bivalves. Note "eye-like" appearance of the shell. The round shell is gray/tan in color. ***Did you know?*** *The smooth, egg masses of moon snails are surrounded by a "sand collar" held together with mucous.*

### **Lightning whelk (*Busycon contrarium*)**

*How to identify:* This shell has small knobs on its "shoulder" and has brown streaks. Live specimens will have an operculum. Whelks lay eggs in strands of cases that look like what you see in the photo. This is a left-handed whelk. ***Did you know?*** *Whelks and their egg cases are commonly found along sandy beaches and intertidal flats.*

### **Common octopus (*Octopus vulgaris*)**

*How to identify:* The octopus has 8 arms, a beak, a radula, but no internal shell. They can change colors (to blend in), squirt ink, and can make a quick escape! ***Did you know?*** *They are found in shallow water hiding in cracks, crevices, under rocks, etc. The octopus is usually nocturnal (feeds at night) and preys on crabs and other crustaceans.*

### **Squid (*Loligo pealei*)**

*How to identify:* Can be easily distinguished from the octopus by having 10 arms and wing-like fins. Its body is more streamlined than that of the octopus. ***Did you know?*** *Squids (like octopi) have special skin cells called chromatophores. These cells help the squid to quickly change color and blend in with their surroundings.*

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**Arthropods** – ***Did you know?*** *These animals have a hard shell (exoskeleton), a segmented body, and jointed appendages (such as legs). Crustaceans are arthropods that live mostly underwater. Examples of crustaceans are barnacles, shrimps, crabs, and lobsters.*

### **Acorn barnacle (*Balanus* sp.)**

*How to identify:* Acorn barnacles live in volcano shaped shells attached to rocks or wooden structures. They are usually found in the intertidal zone. ***Did you know?*** *Barnacles feed by sticking their feather-like cirri (feet) out of the shell, into the water and waving them in order to collect food. Or to put it another way... they feed upside down, on their backs, by kicking food in their mouth.*

### **Horseshoe crab (*Limulus polyphemus*)**

*How to identify:* It is shaped like a horseshoe and has a long spike-like tail. ***Did you know?*** *This "crab" is not really a crab (and not even a crustacean!) but more related to a spider. They "plow" through sandy or muddy bottoms in search of small animals to eat. Females usually grow larger than males. Some people think the animal's long spike-like tail is for defense, but it really isn't. The animal uses its tail to turn itself back over if its gets flipped upside down.*

### **Green striped hermit crab (*Clibanarius vittatus*)**

*How to identify:* This hermit crab has green and white down its legs. Claws are spoon tipped (rounded). It is often found in tulip shells, crown conchs, or whelk shells as adults.

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### **Atlantic decorator crab (*Stenoclanops* sp.)**

*How to identify:* Look for the debris stuck on this crab's body! Plus, look for the two spines that curve in above his eyes. This crab has long legs and even longer claws. ***Did you know?*** *The shell is covered with little hairs in which the crab attaches seaweed, seagrass, and other objects as camouflage – that's why he is called the decorator crab!*

### **Blue crab (*Callinectes sapidus*)**

*How to identify:* This crab can be distinguished by its greenish blue coloration and flattened (last pair) of legs. ***Did you know?*** *Its scientific name means "good tasting." Soft shell crabs are blue crabs that have shed their old shell and are waiting for their new one to harden. Blue crabs can be found on mud bottoms in shallow water but can also be found crawling through sea grass beds looking for food!*

### **Spider crab (*Mithrax spinosissimus*) \***

*How to identify:* This large crab can be 7 inches across the shell! The crab's shell and legs have lots of spines and bumps. This crab has very sharp and strong tips on its legs. Its color is reddish brown. It lives around rocks and other rubble in shallow water. ***(NOTE: This crab may not be pictured correctly on MEE Species CD. May disregard this crab until CD/PPT is revised.)***

### **Stone crab (*Menippe mercenaria*)**

*How to identify:* This crab has large black tipped claws and a heavy looking but smooth shell. Adults can be dark brown, mottled and speckled with gray. Immature stone crabs are often dark with light colored rings on their legs and bluish purple shell. ***Did you know?*** *Stone crabs can make sounds. On the inside of the claw is a pattern that looks like a fingerprint. The crab will rub this "fingerprint" against his shell, producing a sound. Stone crab claws are commercially important as seafood. They usually have a "crusher" and a "pincer" claw - can you tell which is which? (Try to find out!)*

### **Mud crab (*Panopeus* or *Eurypanopeus* sp.)**

*How to identify:* This crab is smaller than a stone crab and has "teeth" around the edge of its shell. Its shell is a little rougher in texture than the stone crab with more of a "mud" color. Another way to identify this crab is to look for the "tooth" between the fingers of the claws. ***Did you know?*** *It is found in and under oyster clumps and/or rock rubble. Like the stone crab it has a crusher type claw (for crushing shells) and a cutting "pincer" claw (for tearing meat).*

### **Ghost crab (*Ocypode quadrata*)**

*How to identify:* These crabs are sandy-gray in color and have a rather square shell. Their eyes are on long stalks. ***Did you know?*** *They are found on sandy beaches of Florida where they dig holes above the high tide line. They usually feed at night along the water's edge.*

### **(Gulf) Arrow crab (*Metoporphaphis calcarata* and NOT *Stenorhynchus seticornis*) \***

*How to identify:* This small, fragile looking crab has a triangular shaped body and long slender appendages. It has a long, pointed rostrum (or spine above the eyes).

### **Fiddler crab (*Uca pugilator*)**

*How to identify:* Male fiddler crabs have one claw larger than the other. ***Did you know?*** *Male fiddler crabs will wave their larger claw to attract females of the same species or to warn males to stay away.*

### **Mole crab or sand flea (*Emerita talpoida*)**

*How to identify:* The mole crab is oval in shape and sandy in color, if not slightly pink. The tail and legs are held tightly beneath them. ***Did you know?*** *The mole crab burrows just below the surface of the sand where waves wash up on the shore. They have large antennae that stick out above the sand. These antennae collect food particles in the water.*

### **White shrimp (*Penaeus setiferus*)**

*How to identify:* Look for "teeth" on upper and lower part of the rostrum (horn) and grooves on the side of it (rostrum). This shrimp is pale in color. ***Did you know?*** *This is a commercially important shrimp.*

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### **Spiny lobster (*Panulirus argus*)**

*How to identify:* The Florida spiny lobster does not have the large claws of a Maine lobster but it does have longer, spiny antennae and two "horns" over the eyes. It is brownish in color with yellowish spots on the tail and carapace. ***Did you know?*** *When they are young they live in grassy areas and sponges but when they are big enough they move into deeper water around reefs or other rocky areas. This lobster is commercially important because its tail (abdomen actually) is very popular as seafood.*

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**Echinoderms** – ***Did you know?*** *This group includes starfish, sea urchins, sea cucumbers, and brittle stars. They have "spiny skin" and radial symmetry.*

### **Variegated urchin (*Lytechinus variegates*)**

*How to identify:* It is often green and white but color may vary. These urchins can be reddish purple or pinkish red too! The test (shell) can be 3 inches in diameter with rather short spines.

***Did you know?*** *It will often camouflage itself with bits of shell, sea grass, or seaweed.*

### **Pencil urchin (*Eucladaris tribuloides*)**

*How to identify:* Pencil urchins can be identified by their blunt, thick spines. The spines on the upper part of the shell are longer than the lower part. It is light brown in color with stripes or shading of darker brown. There may be a greenish or reddish color to it as well. ***Did you know?*** *It is found on reefs or in shallow water.*

### **Keyhole sand dollar (*Mellita quinquiesperforata*)**

*How to identify:* It has a very flat test with five holes. Live specimens can be light brown or gray in color. Look for the starfish design in the middle. ***Did you know?*** *It is found in shallow, sandy areas.*

### **Common Sea star (*Echinaster* sp.)**

*How to identify:* This sea star has five arms that are rather short and blunt with small spines (though they are hard to see on dead, dry specimens). It can be orange or brown in color.

### **Brittle star (*Ophionereis reticulata*)**

*How to identify:* Brittle stars have a well defined central disc with very long, slender arms. ***Did you know?*** *They are called brittle stars because when handled or picked up, their arms often break off.*

### **Sea cucumber (*Pentacta pigmaea*)**

*How to identify:* Sea cucumbers look more like giant fat worms or sausages. They really don't have much in the way of spines, nor much of any shell. ***Did you know?*** *They feed on organic matter in the bottom sediments. If they are roughly handled or threatened by some animal, they may throw out their insides. Luckily they can regenerate these back!*

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**Tunicates (sea squirts)** – ***Did you know?*** *Tunicates have soft bodies enclosed in a sac like covering (or tunic!). They attached to objects underwater and have two openings. They filter feed by bringing water in one opening and pushing it out the other opening. Do you know why they are called sea squirts? It has nothing to do with their size!*

### **Leathery sea squirt (*Styela plicata*)**

*How to identify:* This sea squirt has a tan colored surface. It is often found growing in large clumps of many individuals. Each tunicate can grow to about 2 ¾ inches.

## Section 3: Marine and Coastal Vertebrates Identification



**Fishes** - *Did you know?* Fishes are animals that have fins for swimming and gills for breathing. Many (but not all) have scales. Some have a skeleton made of cartilage (rays and sharks) but most have a skeleton made of bone (snappers, groupers, catfish, angelfish, etc.).

### **Southern stingray (*Dasyatis sp.*)**

*How to identify:* Flat shape, dark brown/gray in color, common in bays and estuaries. *Did you know?* A barb near the base of the stingray's tail can inflict a painful wound if someone steps on the stingray with bare feet. Can you do the stingray shuffle?

### **Bonnethead shark (*Sphyrna tiburo*)**

*How to identify:* This shark is smaller in size than other types of hammerhead sharks- they grow to only three or four feet in length. The bonnethead shark has a much more rounded snout than its cousin the hammerhead. *Did you know?* It can be found in bays and estuaries and off beaches.

### **Nurse shark (*Ginglymostoma cirratum*)**

*How to identify:* The nurse shark is brown in color, has a small mouth, and can be distinguished by having "barbels" at the front end of its mouth.

### **Sheepshead porgy (*Archosargus probatocephalus*)**

*How to identify:* This fish is flattened side to side but can be easily distinguished by its vertical dark bands (see arrow). *Did you know?* This fish feeds on other animals that have shells such as mussels, oysters, and crabs. Because it must break through the shells of their prey - it has a set of awesome teeth that look more human-like than fish-like. Catch one or go to a seafood market and check them out!

### **Pinfish (*Lagodon rhomboides*)**

*How to identify:* The spot above the pectoral fin (behind gill, see arrow) is a distinguishing characteristic. They have sharp spines in their dorsal fin (Get it? Pinfish!). *Did you know?* These fish are very common in estuaries; they are known as "bait-stealers" although their mouth is quite small.

### **Atlantic croaker (*Micropogonias undulates*)**

*How to identify:* This member of the drum family can be recognized by its silver color and many tiny chin barbels. (Note the kingfish only has ONE.) *Did you know?* It makes a drumming/croaking sound when caught. It usually lives in bays and estuaries, nearshore coastal waters.

### **Spotted seatrout (*Cynoscion nebulosus*)**

*How to identify:* The spotted seatrout has prominent round black spots on its back (and even into tail) and one or two prominent "canine" like teeth present in the upper jaw. Its lower jaw extends beyond its upper jaw. *Did you know?* Seatrout are important as sportfish and live inshore over seagrass beds sandy/mud bottoms.

### **Striped burrfish (*Chilomycterus schoepfi*)**

*How to identify:* This puffer fish can inflate itself if threatened. Their spines are up all the time. Note: Other puffers have big spines that lay flat until they "puff" up or have very small spines. *Did you know?* Their teeth form a strong parrot-like beak - watch your fingers! They are usually found inshore, over grass beds, docks, patch reefs.

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### **Toadfish (*Opsanus spp.*)**

*How to identify:* They are well camouflaged and have a large, wide mouth. They have brown, tan, and white patches over the body. ***Did you know?*** *These fish live on the bottom under rocks or shells in seagrass beds, bays, and estuaries. They are also known as “oyster crackers” because they have powerful jaws that can crush oysters.*

### **Mullet (*Mugil spp.*)**

*How to identify:* They are bluish-gray or green above, silver on sides. They have a small upturned mouth. Note the location of fins and overall body shape. ***Did you know?*** *Mullet are common baitfish. Schools of small mullet can be seen just under the water's surface. Mullet often jump out of the water when pursued.*

### **Hardhead catfish (*Arius felis*)**

*How to identify:* This fish has four barbels (whiskers) on its chin. ***Did you know?*** *The catfish has sharp serrated poisonous spines in its dorsal and pectoral fins. Catfish are very slippery so don't pick one up with bare hands and be careful not to get pricked by those spines!*

### **Black seabass (*Centropristis striata*)**

*How to identify:* The black sea bass is very dark in color. The dorsal fin has rows of white stripes. Look for the sharp spine near the back of the gill, just above the pectoral fin. ***Did you know?*** *Black seabass start life as females. Some older, larger females change and turn into males so they can breed.*

### **Gag grouper (*Mycteroperca microlepis*)**

*How to identify:* The gag grouper has dark “worm-like” markings on its side. Like all groupers it has a large mouth. ***Did you know?*** *It is found around reefs/hard bottom areas. Young may be found in sea grass beds. Groupers can change their sex (female to male) as they grow.*

### **Grey snapper (*Lutjanus griseus*)**

*How to identify:* Also known as mangrove snapper. This snapper can be distinguished from other snappers by a dark band through the eye. This band fades as the snapper gets older or when it dies. The anal fin is rounded. Look for the two canine teeth in upper jaw. ***Did you know?*** *It can be found around coral reef areas OR inshore around mangroves.*

### **Jack crevalle (*Caranx hippos*)**

*How to identify:* This fish has a steep sloping head and a sickle-shaped, deeply forked tail. Note the spot on the gill cover. The jack's body is designed for fast swimming.

### **Lookdown (*Selene vomer*)**

*How to identify:* This fish is like a flat plate sitting on its edge. The front of the head has a very steep slope, hence the name “lookdown.”

### **Great barracuda (*Sphyraena barracuda*)**

*How to identify:* This fish has a long, streamline shape with some really mean looking sharp teeth. Note lower jaw extends beyond the upper jaw.

### **Triggerfish (*Balistes spp.*)**

*How to identify:* These fish have tough leathery skin and are flattened vertically. They have a special dorsal spine that can “lock” in the up position. ***Did you know?*** *They use this spine to wedge themselves into a crack or crevice so that predators can't get to them.*

### **Queen angelfish (*Holocanthus ciliaris*)**

*How to identify:* Queen angelfish have a blue – ringed “crown” on the head (a patch/dark spot) (Blues do not). The queen has a more yellow tail. ***Did you know?*** *These fish live around coral reefs.*

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### **Lined seahorse (*Hippocampus erectus*)**

*How to identify:* Seahorses have long tube shaped mouths. They use their tail to hang on to underwater objects. The male seahorse has a pouch between his abdomen and tail. ***Did you know?*** *The female deposits eggs into the male's pouch and then he keeps the developing baby seahorses until they are ready to "hatch".*

### **Pipefish (*Sygnathus* sp.)**

*How to identify:* Pipefish are related to the seahorses; males have a pouch in which they incubate the fertilized eggs. They have a long "pipe" like body, one small dorsal fin and a long tube shaped snout/mouth.

### **Gulf flounder (*Paralichthys albigutta*)**

*How to identify:* This flatfish has 3 distinct spots and is often blotchy in appearance. ***Did you know?*** *Flounders are called "flatfish" but don't start out being flat. A young flounder when it hatches from an egg looks like a normal fish but as it grows, the right eye "migrates" over to the other side.*

### **Snook (*Centropomus undecimalis*)**

*How to identify:* This fish has a distinct black lateral line, two dorsal fins, and a large mouth. The lower jaw is longer than the upper jaw. ***Did you know?*** *It is popular as a sportfish for anglers.*

### **Batfish (*Ogcocephalus* sp.)**

*How to identify:* This unusual fish has a flattened head and limb-like pectoral fins. They "walk" on their fins across the seafloor. Their skin is rough, often bumpy, and their coloration helps them blend in with the bottom.

### **White grunt (*Haemulon plumieri*)**

*How to identify:* This common grunt has a light bluish-gray body color, a head with horizontal blue stripes, a white underbelly, and a large, bright orange mouth! ***Did you know?*** *It makes a grunting sound when caught. It is found around reefs, pilings, etc.*

### **Red drum or Redfish (*Sciaenops ocellatus*)**

*How to identify:* This fish has a copper bronze body and usually has at least one, if not more, distinct spots at the base of its tail. It does not have barbels under its chin. ***Did you know?*** *The redfish is a prized sporting fish. It is commonly found in estuaries and shallow coastal regions such as bays, along tidal creeks, oyster beds, seagrass areas.*

### **Dolphin fish (Mahi mahi) (*Coryphaena hippurus*)**

*How to identify:* This fish is bright greenish-blue above. Notice the shape of the head and the deeply forked tail. The single dorsal fin extends from the head all the way to the tail. ***Did you know?*** *Young live in floating sargassum weed for protection. The head of the male is more blunt and vertically sloped (male shown in slide). Females have a more gently sloped head.*

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**REPTILES – *Did you know?*** *Reptiles are animals that are cold-blooded. They breathe with lungs and have scales. Although most reptiles live on land or in freshwater habitats, some live in the marine environment (such as sea turtles and crocodiles).*

### **Loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*)**

*How to identify:* Loggerheads can be recognized by their broad, brown heads. ***Did you know?*** *They commonly nest on Florida's beaches between about April and August.*

## SPECIES IDENTIFICATION COMPANION GUIDE

### **Hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricate*)**

*How to identify:* This turtle can be identified by the mottled coloration as well as by its sharply-pointed mouth/beak and pointed scutes along the back edge of the shell. ***Did you know?*** *In the past, the hawksbill turtle was hunted for its beautiful speckled shell.*

### **American alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*)**

*How to identify:* Alligators have a "U" shaped, rounded snout. When an alligator's mouth is closed, the lower teeth are not as visible. ***Did you know?*** *They live in freshwater marshes, swamps and lakes though they have been known to venture into brackish water at times (or even backyard pools!)*

### **American crocodile (*Crocodylus acutus*)**

*How to identify:* Crocodiles have a more "V" shaped snout. The upper and lower teeth of crocodiles are more visible when the mouth is closed than an alligator. (They have a more "toothy" grin!). ***Did you know?*** *They are typically found in brackish calm waters of extreme southern Florida but may also venture into freshwater.*

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**Birds - *Did you know?*** *Birds are animals with feathers. Some feathers are designed to help birds fly, other feathers help repel water. Some water birds have a special gland near their tail that produces a water proofing oil. The bird uses its beak to spread this oil through its feathers when it grooms or "preens" itself.*

### **Brown pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*)**

*How to identify:* Look for the big pouch under their long bill. Watch them dive head first into the water for fish. They love to hang out around piers and docks. ***Did you know?*** *The brown pelican is often seen around saltwater areas where people fish. Because of this, pelicans can sometimes become entangled in fishing line. This could injure or even kill them over time. Pelicans are also losing nesting areas because of coastal development..*

### **Anhinga (*Anhinga anhinga*)**

*How to identify:* They have a long neck and a straight pointed bill. ***Did you know?*** *The anhinga does NOT have oil glands to help waterproof its feathers so when the feathers get wet the bird must sit somewhere and spread their wings out to dry! Anhingas are usually seen around ponds and swamps rather than coastal beaches. They swim at the surface then dive down under water to spear their food.*

### **Roseate spoonbill (*Ajaia ajaja*)**

*How to identify:* Spoonbills have a spoon-shaped mouth. Adult birds have red eyes, bald heads. ***Did you know?*** *Spoonbills feed by swinging their head from side to side.*

### **Great blue heron (*Ardea herodias*)**

*How to identify:* It is a large, grayish heron with a yellowish bill. In flight it folds its neck in. Found around salt and brackish waters. ***Did you know?*** *A color variation of this species is the great white heron (not the same as great egret!). The great white heron can be distinguished by its yellowish-green legs, whereas the great egret has black legs.*

### **Yellow-crowned night heron (*Nycticorax violaceus*)**

*How to identify:* As its name says, this bird has a yellow crown. Notice the white patch under the red eye and the long feathers on top of its head.

### **Great egret (*Casmerodius albus*)**

*How to identify:* The all white body, black legs and yellow bill, make the great egret easy to identify.

## SPECIES IDENTIFICATION COMPANION GUIDE

### **White ibis (*Eudocimus albus*)**

*How to identify:* The adults are white with black wing tips. Their bill has a downward curve and is red. Young birds are brown above and white below with brown bill and legs.

### **Frigate bird (*Fregata magnificens*)**

*How to identify:* The male frigate bird has a bright red pouch which can be puffed up during courtship to attract a female. Females have a white breast and black neck. It spends most of its time in the air soaring. Look for the forked tail. *Did you know?* *The frigate bird is also called the “man-o-war bird” because it attacks other birds and steals their food.*

### **Laughing gull (*Larus atricilla*)**

*How to identify:* A common gull that has a black head in summer and mottled head in winter and is seldom far from saltwater.

### **Ring-billed gull (*Larus delawarensis*)**

*How to identify:* A common gull, often found further inland. The most distinguishing feature of this bird is the black ring on the yellow bill of the adult. Adults have greenish yellow legs.

### **Bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)**

*How to identify:* The white head and tail make this bird easy to identify. An eagle will get its white head after reaching 4 years of age. The chest of the bald eagle is dark, while that of the osprey is white. Immature eagles are brown. *Did you know?* *Use of the pesticide DDT prior to the 1970's resulted in a dramatic decrease in the bald eagle population. As eagles ate fish that contained DDT, the DDT caused the eagles to lay very soft-shelled eggs that dried out or broke. Today the population is on the rise and nests can often be seen on special nesting platforms built above power lines. They can be seen in coastal marshes of the Gulf of Mexico, in the Florida Keys, and other coastal areas of Florida.*

### **Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)**

*How to identify:* The bird's plumage (feathers) are dark above and light below. Ospreys have white on their heads and are often mistaken for eagles, but the chest of the osprey is white, while that of the eagle is dark. Wings are held in an arched position during flight. Their call is a series of loud clear whistles. *Did you know?* *The osprey, or fish hawk, can often be seen flying with a fish in its talons (claws). It will hover over the water then fly down to the surface and grab a fish, sometimes even diving under it. Ospreys nest on high perches such as the top of dead trees or poles.*

### **Black skimmer (*Rynchops niger*)**

*How to identify:* The lower and heavier looking bill is longer than the upper. *Did you know?* *This bird has an unusual way to feed. The longer lower bill is dragged through the water to catch/scoop up food. They can be seen on beaches or exposed sand bars in groups – with all facing into the wind.*

### **American oystercatcher (*Haematopus palliatus*)**

*How to identify:* This bird has black and white plumage, large white wing stripe, and a red bill. It feeds on shellfish and may be found in small groups usually away from other shorebirds.

### **Redwing blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)**

*How to identify:* The shoulders (not the entire wings) of the male blackbird are bright red with a yellow margin. Females are commonly mistaken for sparrows.

### **Wood stork (*Mycteria americana*)**

*How to identify:* The wood stork has a bald head and neck. *Did you know?* *The wood stork has become endangered because of a loss of its wetland habitat. The stork requires water of a certain depth range in order to feed. Wood storks are also called “preacher birds” because of the way they stand around in groups looking dignified and solemn.*

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**Marine Mammals** – *Did you know? Marine mammals, like all mammals, are warm blooded, breathe air using lungs (not gills!), and have hair. (Though very little on whales and dolphins.)*

**Manatee** (*Trichechus manatus*)

*How to identify:* Manatees are air-breathing marine mammals. They can be seen breathing at the surface. They are large and slow moving animals. ***Did you know?*** *They are also called sea cows because they eat aquatic vegetation. They are relatives of the elephant. They can be found in freshwater and saltwater environments. The biggest threat to them is being hit and injured/killed by boats.*

**Whales** - ***DID YOU KNOW?*** *Whales are marine mammals that breath air through one or two blowholes on top of their head and then to a pair of lungs. There are two main types of whales - Those that have teeth and those that have baleen. Baleen are brush-like structures that hang from the roof of a whale's mouth. Baleen filters food (such as krill) from the water. To feed baleen whales take a mouthful of water, close their baleen plates, and force the water out of their mouths through the baleen. They then probably use their large tongues to scrape the plankton off the inside of the baleen and swallow it- yum! Baleen whales have 2 blowholes while toothed whales have only one. Whales live in social groups called pods.*

**Bottlenose dolphin** (*Tursiops truncates*)

*How to identify:* Dolphins are small toothed whales. They have smooth skin, are bluish gray above, paler on their sides and whitish gray on their throat and belly. They have a beak that is long and broad. Do not get this animal confused with the dolphin fish (mahi mahi)! Dolphins and porpoises are not the same animal. ***Did you know?*** *Dolphins use echolocation to find prey in the water.*

**Humpback whale** (*Megaptera novaeangliae*)

*How to identify:* The humpback is a baleen whale. It has a big head with bumps (protuberances). It can grow about 52 feet long. The humpback's tail (fluke) may have patches of white. ***Did you know?*** *The humpback feeds mostly on plankton! Humpbacks are very vocal whales and are best known for their unique and amazing "songs." The name "humpback" comes from the way it arches its back out of the water before it makes a dive.*

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**The Florida 4-H Program thanks the following people for reviewing and providing input to the MEE Species Identification Companion Guide:**

- Maia McGuire, Florida Sea Grant, St. Johns County
- Bryan Fluech, Florida Sea Grant, Collier County
- Rich Abrams, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
- Laura Lok, 4-H Public Relations Coordinator, University of Florida