

# Biscayne

NATIONAL MONUMENT • FLORIDA

## ADMINISTRATION

Biscayne National Monument is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. Temporary headquarters for the monument are at Homestead Bayfront Park, which is operated by the Dade County Park and Recreation Department. The superintendent of Biscayne National Monument, whose address is P.O. Box 1369, Homestead, FL 33030, is in immediate charge.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities for water, fish, wildlife, mineral, land, park, and recreational resources. Indian and Territorial affairs are other major concerns of America's "Department of Natural Resources." The Department works to assure the wisest choice in managing all our resources so each will make its full contribution to a better United States—now and in the future.

**National Park Service**  
**U. S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**



*On the surface—sunlight sparkling and dancing on blue waters; islands, long and narrow, floating offshore; green trees waving at fishermen in small boats and pleasure parties in white yachts.*

*In the sky—birds, sailing, sliding, floating, and dipping, white and black against a sky-blue curtain.*

*Under the waters—fishes painted in bright colors, moving with effortless grace among sea plants coupled in ceaseless swaying with the waters; corals in many colors and contorted shapes; a strange world of filtered light, color, and silence.*

Biscayne National Monument is the stage for these activities. The greater part of its 96,000 acres is water and reef. Here lies rich and varied tropical marine life. You will find the park a good place to gain an understanding of a wonderful and complex geologic-biologic process—the building of a coral reef. Because the park borders the temperate and tropic zones, it has communities of plants and animals of both zones on the land and in the waters.

The colorful waterlife includes schools of grunt, porkfish and wrasses, the queen angelfish, and neon gobies, to name a few of the fishes. Sponges, sea “grasses,” hard corals, and their plantlike relatives, the sea feathers and sea whips, cover the bottom. Algae are common marine plants, taking many different shapes and ranging from blue-green and green to dull reds and browns.

In a very real sense, many of the plants and animals exist here because of the coral reefs that provide them with food, protection, and places to hide and rear their young. The great variety of life in the coral reefs provides sustenance for all—those that prey and those that are preyed upon.

Reefs owe their existence to groups of animals and plants which deposit calcium around themselves as a protective shell. The park's reefs are predominantly of coral, both living and dead. Lime building of the corals progresses best at temperatures of 68° F. and warmer. In addition to warm water, corals require moving salt water, a firm foundation to start on (succeeding generations build on top of the limestone “houses” of their ancestors), and shallow water (less than 150—200 feet). The Biscayne reefs and their southern continuation in John Pennekamp State Park and the southern Florida Keys lie in waters generally no deeper than 40 feet. Besides the corals, the reefs are made by calcareous algae and bryozoans.

The park has about 25 islands or keys forming an almost continuous north-south chain. Woody vegetation covers the keys almost completely. Mangroves invade the sea along much of the shoreline, and a startling variety of tropical hardwoods dominates the higher interior. Rapidly returning second growth is recreating much of the hardwood forest sacrificed in the past to cultivation or fire. There are some remnant stands of larger trees, including mahoganies. Found here are the raccoon and opossum and less frequently seen mammals

such as the bobcat. Water birds are common in some areas; the Arsenicker Keys are nesting areas.

Eastward of the coastal islands the ocean floor slopes gently to depths of 10 to 15 feet in Hawk Channel, a natural safe passage for larger boats traveling up and down the keys. Seaward of Hawk Channel is a wide band of highly varied subaquatic terrain consisting primarily of coral patch reefs and turtle grass. The protective outlying barrier reefs are just inside the park's eastern boundary. Beyond these reefs the ocean floor drops rapidly off into the depths of the Florida current (Gulf Stream).

Landward of the coastal islands is a well-sheltered section of Florida's Biscayne Bay. Its waters average 8 to 10 feet and shoal to shallow banks on each side averaging 3 to 5 feet. The Intracoastal Waterway crosses the bay north to south.

#### **MAN IN THE KEYS**

Numerous archeological sites throughout the Florida Keys provide evidence that Indians inhabited the area long ago. Certainly, they also occupied the keys within the park. The main shipping routes of early colonial powers, especially Spain and England, passed close to the Florida Keys, called “*Los Mártires*” by the Spanish. Pirates also used these waters; Caesar Creek is named after the notorious Black Caesars who operated here in the keys where the treacherous reefs claimed many ships. Recent wrecks and some dating back to the 16th century still lie below the waters here.

At times small numbers of hardy settlers occupied the keys, fishing the waters and farming the land. But the park's lands include some of the few keys which have been relatively undeveloped.

Today, people enjoy a variety of water-oriented recreational activities here. Fishing and pleasure boating are the most popular pastimes. There are few sandy beaches in the park; most of the shoreline is exposed, rough coral rock. Therefore swimming, snorkeling, and scuba diving are done mostly from boats. On land you can camp, picnic, and hike.

#### **WHAT WE ARE PLANNING**

The park is in its initial planning stages; there are few public facilities now. A ferry service to the keys is planned, but presently you can get there only in your own or a hired boat; no public boat transportation is available. Visitor facilities do exist on Elliott Key. Additional facilities are planned there and in other areas, both within the park and on the adjacent mainland.

Other services and facilities under consideration include boat transportation and tours within the park, bicycling and hiking trails, self-guiding nature trails, and interpretive exhibits and programs, including devices which will enable you to better understand this fascinating underwater world by viewing it firsthand.

Biscayne National Monument has a limited land area. Thus, the land recreational developments also will be limited so they will not disturb the exceedingly fragile resources.



### SAFETY ON BOARD

If you explore the park by boat, know and practice water safety rules and be aware of potential dangers. Every boat must be equipped with a U.S. Coast Guard-approved lifejacket for each passenger. Remember, you are safest with an experienced guide, and navigational charts of the area (National Ocean Survey Charts 1249 and 141-SC) are indispensable. You should read and comply with U.S. Coast Guard, State, and National Park Service boating regulations and navigational aids.

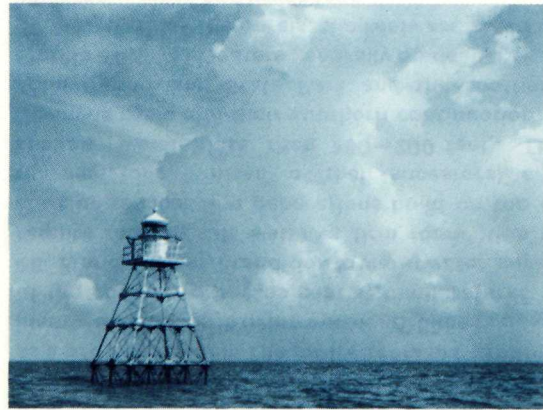
Small boat operators *should be cautious of rough sea conditions* which can develop quickly in the open waters seaward of the keys. Although small boats can go almost anywhere within the park, all boaters should be wary of shallow banks, shoals, and coral reef patches which can pose a hazard to even the smallest boats.

### SAFETY IN THE WATER

There are no protected swimming areas within the park. Snorkelers and scuba divers should *prominently display the regulation diver's flag*. Swimmers and divers should be wary of other boats and *should be cautious when swimming in areas noted for especially strong tidal currents*, such as the narrow cuts and channels between keys. Boaters should always exercise caution in approaching any moored boats or other areas where swimmers or divers may be expected to be in the water.

Snorkelers are cautioned that cuts from coral and punctures from the common spiny sea urchin may be painful and slow to heal. A good practice is to enjoy the reef by looking only; touch nothing unless you are sure of it. All water life should be treated with respect.

Snorkelers are strongly advised to observe the basic rules of their sport. **NEVER SWIM ALONE**. Inexperienced snorkelers are urged to study a good manual and learn well the rules of snorkeling and scuba diving.



Unmanned light located on Pacific Reef Reef near the southeast corner of the monument; typical summer cumulus clouds.

### PLEASE DO NOT—

—*Litter the water or the land*. Keep your trash on board your boat until you reach land and can put it in a trash receptacle; use them also when you are on land.

—*Pick, remove or injure* any plant or animal life on the islands, in the bay, or on the ocean reef. *Remember*, all corals, seafans, seafeathers, and other marine organisms are protected and should not be collected or disturbed.

### PLEASE DO—

—*Respect private property*. Some lands within the park are privately owned.

—*Keep all pets* under restrictive control.

—*Observe fishing regulations*. Fishing is permitted in accordance with Florida laws. No license is required for salt water sport fishing.

—*Practice good boating manners* and respect the right of others to enjoy their visit.

—*Explore this park* and rejoice in the beauty of form and of life that is here. It is all protected for you and the thousands of people who will come after you and who will want to see what you have seen and enjoyed.

### ACCOMMODATIONS

Facilities at Elliott Key include a small boat marina, primitive campground, picnic area, restrooms, and saltwater showers. Fresh water is not available. There are public and private campgrounds in the general area, including Homestead Bayfront Park. Meals, lodging, gasoline, and other supplies can be obtained in nearby Homestead. Numerous well-supplied marinas are located along the mainland coast and in the upper Florida Keys.

Rough Key Largo limestone and mangrove thickets form most of the shoreline of the monument's keys.

