



EPILOGUE

Mullet, like Muggy, swim in schools in fresh water or salt water. They eat some of the smallest animals and plants in the estuary. Some of the largest animals, such as dolphins and alligators, eat mullet! So do herons and otters.

Near the mouth of the Caloosahatchee River, a school of mullet skims through the water. A yellow-crowned night-heron, like Nick, wades in the shallows. He would rather eat a crab, but mullet taste good too. As herons fly in and around the harbor, they see alligators and otters.

An alligator, like Missy, floats in the water near the mouth of Peace River. When a school of mullet swims by, she snaps one up. An alligator could eat a heron if it could catch one, and it will even attack an otter.

On the bank of the Myakka River are some webbed or fanned tracks and some mullet bones and scales. These are the signs that an otter, like Lu, lives here. The otter also makes "slides" where the grass is flattened down to the water, but large alligators make slides that look the same! An otter will also make a meal of heron eggs.

Many animals and plants live in Charlotte Harbor. Some, such as algae,

bacteria and zooplankton, are too tiny to see. Others, such as dragonflies, tree frogs and meadow beauties, are small enough to be overlooked. Many, such as cabbage palms, mockingbirds and gray squirrels, are so common that people don't talk about them. A few, such as bald eagles or gopher tortoises, are rare.

The Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program is a partnership. It protects the estuaries and watersheds from Venice to Bonita Springs to Winter Haven. The study area includes all or parts of Charlotte, DeSoto, Hardee, Lee, Manatee, Polk and Sarasota counties. The partners are people who live and visit the study area, the officials whom they elect, people who manage nature, people who use nature in their jobs and people who have fun in nature. These partners work together to solve problems. The loss of places where fish and wildlife live is one problem. Water quality is another. A third is how water flows through the 4,700-square-mile study area. The fourth problem is how people take care of nature.

Won't you join as a partner to help solve these problems?

