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## Keys to a Healthy Habitat

Arcing 220 miles south and west of the Florida mainland, the island chain known as the Florida Keys does a lot more than just separate the Atlantic Ocean from the Gulf of Mexico.

Two animal species found only in the Florida Keys are the Key Deer, and the Key Largo Woodrat. The diminutive Key Deer is a strong swimmer, and was once common throughout the southern keys. These days its habitat is limited to just a couple of islands. The adorable Key Largo Woodrat's adventures are constrained to its namesake island only. its territory includes an area known as the Crocodile Lake National Wildlife Refuge, a living arrangement that would seem to favor the crocodiles.

The Florida Reef Tract is the only living coral barrier reef in the US, and the third largest reef system worldwide. The key islands are themselves composed of fossilized coral reefs and sandbars. With a history dating back to the retreat of the Wisconsin Glacier some 5,000-7,000 years ago, the reef is home to an ultra-diverse network of around 1,400 species of plants and animals.

It should come as no surprise that this habitat is now under very serious threat from climate change. Scientists at the Florida Aquarium in Tampa, Florida recently succeeded in getting a near-extinct species of coral to spawn in the laboratory, raising hope for the long term future of the Florida Reef

