

ALLIGATOR FACTS

Common name: American alligator
Scientific name: *Alligator mississippiensis*

Appearance: Alligators have long, armored, lizard-like bodies with flat muscular tails. They have long, rounded, shovel-shaped snouts with nostrils at the end to breathe while most of the body is under the water. They have four short legs with five toes on the front feet and four on the rear. The skin on back is armored with rows of embedded bony plates called scutes. Young alligators have bright yellow stripes and blotches, but adults are dark with pale bellies. Average adults range in size from 8 feet for females to 11 feet for males, and can weigh more than 1000 pounds.

Range: Alligators are found all over the Southeastern United States. There are large populations in Florida, and coastal areas of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia.

Habitat: Large shallow lakes, marshes, ponds, swamps, rivers, creeks and canals in fresh water, and areas with brackish water (a mix of salt and fresh water).

Diet: Insects, snails, fish, crabs, birds, turtles, snakes and mammals.

Young: Females lay about 40 eggs that hatch in 60 -100 days. Hatchlings are 8-10 inches long.



Growth: How big and fast alligators grow depends on temperature and the amount of food available for them to eat.

Reproduction: Alligators are able to reproduce at about 8–13 years of age, when they are about 6 to 7 feet long. The temperature of the egg while it is in the nest will determine the sex. Alligator nests are mounds of plants, sticks and leaves built and guarded by the females.

Reproductive Behavior: Mating season is in early spring, and nests are built and eggs laid in late spring and summer. Alligators are the most territorial during mating season, and may be aggressive toward intruders.

Alligator Safety: Alligators have attacked people, and most attacks happen when they have been fed by humans or when they are defending their nests.

To be safe: 1. Do not feed alligators; 2. Swim only in designated swimming areas; 3. Report nuisance alligators that are more than 4 feet long and appear to have lost their natural fear of people or otherwise pose a threat to people or property to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (904) 758-0525 .

Legal Aspects: American alligators are listed by the state as a species of concern and by the federal government as threatened due to the similarity in appearance to the endangered American Crocodile. It is illegal to feed, tease, harass, molest, capture or kill alligators.

Credits: Institute of Food and Agricultural Studies, University of Florida
<http://gmv.ifas.ufl.edu/www/agator/htm/alligator.htm>

Image Herp Pictures, References and On-Line Resources. University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
<http://gto.ncsa.uiuc.edu/pingletto/herps/images/crocs/gator.gif>