

# INFORMATION FOR THE PRESS



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### ECONOMIC STATUS OF ALLIGATORS REPORTED UPON IN NEW BULLETIN

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Continued drainage of marsh areas and encroachment of agricultural interests on the natural habitat of alligators, coupled with the wanton manner in which these big reptiles have been hunted, have caused a great decrease in their numbers, states Dr. Remington Kellogg, assistant curator of mammals in the United States National Museum, in a bulletin on "The Habits and Economic Importance of Alligators," just issued by the U. S. Department of Agriculture, with which Doctor Kellogg was formerly connected as associate biologist of the Bureau of Biological Survey. Although alligators in former years were undoubtedly common in the larger rivers and lakes of the Southern States, and they even have ventured short distances into salt water, they have now retreated to the more unfrequented parts of large marshes and to inaccessible areas of extensive swamps.

The study on which the new bulletin is a report had for its object the recording of such facts as have an intimate bearing on the economic relations of alligators, including their relation to other forms of wild life as shown by their food habits and their value to certain industries for their hides, teeth, and other products, as well as the presentation of a brief outline of the essential phases of their life history. In determining the nature of their food habits, a laboratory examination was made of the stomach contents of 157 of the reptiles, obtained along the Gulf coast of the United States. The alligator's food was found to be

made up chiefly of crustaceans; fishes, turtles, and other vertebrates; and insects and spiders. Conclusions reached in the study of the food are that alligators are not seriously destructive of useful forms of wild life, as muskrats and turtles, and important food fishes do not bulk large in their diet; their depredations on crabs and shrimps are not sufficient at present to cause fishermen any difficulty in meeting the market requirements; the insects they consume mostly are economically unimportant, and any influence they may have on the control of objectionable species of animals and plants is for the most part negligible; and they undoubtedly are beneficial in feeding upon the voracious alligator gars, which destroy food fishes, and upon crawfishes, which are burrowing pests of agriculture. All the items identified in the stomachs are listed.

Other subjects discussed include alligator hunting and alligator preserves and farms. Indiscriminate hide hunting, it is stated, has exterminated the animals in many parts of their original range. Large numbers of live and mounted young alligators are disposed of each year to the tourist trade in Florida. The reptiles receive legal protection only in Florida and Louisiana. The bulletin indicates that their perpetuation for their interest as wild-life forms and for commercial uses is dependent upon the preservation of such areas as the Okefenokee Swamp and the Everglades, Fla., and the State wild-life refuges along the Gulf coast of Mississippi and Louisiana, and the establishment of alligator preserves and farms elsewhere.

The bulletin further states that alligators individually are as valuable as other forms of wild life in general, especially to unreclaimed southern marshlands for the commercial value of their hides, and that measures should be taken wherever possible to insure their continued existence as an interesting species, in numbers sufficient for their perpetuation, consistent with reasonable utilization and any necessary control. Copies of the new bulletin (Technical Bulletin 147-T) may be obtained from the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., at 10 cents each.