



American Alligator

National Wildlife Refuge System

- The American alligator is a relic of prehistoric times; the fierce-looking species roamed the earth with dinosaurs more than 150 million years ago. The alligator is also a wildlife conservation success story. Once over-hunted for its skin, the broad-snouted reptile neared extinction until the government set hunting limits in the 1950s.
- The word “alligator” originated from the Spanish “el legarto,” which means “the lizard.”
- American alligators are related to crocodiles, slightly smaller reptiles with narrower snouts.
- Alligators are eight to 15 feet long and weigh 500 to 1,000 pounds. They may be found in rivers, lakes and swamps in Florida, Georgia, Alabama and Louisiana.
- Top predators, alligators move slowly out of water but are adept swimmers, able to seize prey quickly in their powerful big jaws. Though they feed mainly on fish, turtles and other small creatures, they will also attack large animals including pythons, deer and occasionally humans.
- Alligators play an important role in the swamp ecosystem. When water levels drop, the large reptiles dig hollows in the mud. These “gator holes” collect water used by other swamp animals once the alligators move on. The holes also offer animals protection from heat and cold.
- Alligator mating is a noisy affair. On spring nights, bulls roar to attract females and warn off male competitors. After mating, a female lays eggs in a nest in the mud. The young hatch two to three months later and head to the water. Females lay 25-60 eggs in spring; the eggs hatch in summer.



American Alligator / Okefenokee Wildlife League



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