

## Where can we see alligators?

*Alligators are native to the southeast and can be found living in freshwater pools, rivers, and swamps from North Carolina to the Rio Grande in Texas. St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge is home to many, many alligators. You might see them laying on the bank or maybe just their eyes and snout as they cruise the pools*

## Do alligators go into salt water?

*Yes! Sometimes they like to take a dip in Apalachee Bay but they are really fresh water animals.*

## Where do alligators go when it gets cold?

*As cold-blooded reptiles, meaning they cannot regulate their body temperature. They scoop out an underwater burrow that can be up to 65 feet long and retreat to their burrows when the temperatures are too hot or too cold.*

## How do alligators eat?

*Alligators eat almost anything they want. They grasp larger animals in their jaws and spin to tear off a manageable piece. They store the rest of the carcass in their under water burrow to be eaten later.*

## How much does an alligator weigh?

*A large male gator can weigh as much as 1000 pounds—half a ton!*

**Drive carefully and  
watch out for wildlife.  
You never know what  
might be around the  
next curve!**



# Facts About ALLIGATORS

**St. Marks  
National Wildlife Refuge  
Where Wildlife Comes First!**



Photo by George Burton



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St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge

PO Box 68

St. Marks, FL 32355

850-925-6121

[www.fws.gov/saintmarks/](http://www.fws.gov/saintmarks/)

Collecting or taking any plants, animals, or artifacts from federal lands is prohibited.



**Our 'gators are large  
Across the road they amble  
DRIVE 35  
Don't take a gamble!**

The American alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*), has been on earth for about 150,000,000 (one hundred and fifty million!) years. The first alligators looked different than the reptile we see today, but they've outlived dinosaurs.



Photo by Tom Darragh

Alligators have 74-80 teeth. As their teeth wear down new ones come in. An alligator can go through 3,000 teeth in their lifetime!

The muscles used to close their jaws are powerful but the muscles used to open their jaw are much less strong.

They eat almost anything, even fruit. Strong acids help digest the bones, fur, and shells of the animals they eat.

They can "hear" underwater. Each of the spots along their jaws are nerves which alert the gator to even slight splashing in the water. If detected, the alligator will rush to investigate a possible meal even if it isn't hungry at the moment.

Male and female alligators look alike but adult males (11.2 feet average) are larger than adult females (8.2 feet average). reach sexual maturity when they are about 6 feet (1.8 meters) long, a length attained at about 10 to 12 years. Both reach sexual maturity when they are about 6 feet long which takes at least 10 years.

Courtship starts in April, with mating usually occurring in early May. Breeding takes place at night in shallow waters. Males roar to attract females and to warn off other males.

After mating, the female builds a nest from vegetation and lays around 35-50 eggs in late June to early July. Some females can lay up to 90 eggs! She covers the eggs with grasses and stays near the nest to prevent predators from taking the eggs until they hatch which take about 65 days.

The sex of the babies is determined by the temperature of the nest. A temperature of 89.6° F produces 75 % males and 90.5° F and above are mostly females. Other reptiles sometimes use alligator nests to incubate their own eggs.

A new hatchling is 6-8 inches long. They live close together in small groups, called pods.

Photo by Karen Willes



Toward the end of August, the young alligators begin making high-pitched noises from inside of the egg to let the mother know to remove the nesting material.



They look dead. **They are not dead** and move extraordinarily fast when needed!

Photo by Nick Baldwin

A new hatchling is the perfect snack size for wading birds, raccoons, bobcats, turtles, snakes, large fish, turtles - and larger alligators! About 80% do not survive.

She may not look like it, but the mother protects her babies during their early years. Crocodylians are one of the only orders of reptiles that offer maternal care to their young. The juveniles grow about a foot a year.

Once they are about 4 feet long they are safe from predators except larger alligators and humans.

In the wild, alligators can live to about 50 years.

If you see an alligator on the trail, stop and wait (patiently) until it moves on.