

# Alligators

A close-up photograph of an alligator swimming in water. The alligator's head is in the foreground, with its eyes and nostrils visible above the water. The water is dark and rippled, and the background is blurred green foliage.

Florida's Prehistoric  
Predators

Kon Studio

# Size

- Average 8-11 feet long
- Weigh about 1000 pounds
- Compared to an average human which is about 5 feet 5 inches and weigh about 137 pounds.
- Alligators are big animals!



# What do they sound like?

Alligators are very vocal creatures.

They growl like dinosaurs!

- The noise alligators use to talk is called **bellowing**.
- They bellow year-round but increases during mating season.

# Jaws

A large U-shaped snout gives the alligator a powerful jaw strength which helps them bite through hard surfaces such as a turtle shell. This is different from a crocodile which has a narrow V-shaped snout.

Alligators loose and replace their teeth continuously. They go through about 3000 teeth in their lifetime!

# Eyes

## Alligators' eyes glow in the dark!

- The lights that pass into the eyes hit a reflective layer in their retina called the **tapetum lucidum**.
- The reflective layer causes the eyes to glow red!

# Fun Fact!

Cats also have a reflective layer, but their eyes glow a yellow-green, which is different from the alligator which is an orange-red color!

# Cool Features!

- Webbed feet and strong tail.
- Like ducks, their feet help them swim fast
- Their strong tail help propel them through the water!
- They do not walk well on land, however thanks to their webbed feet and strong tail they can swim fast up to 20 mph!

# Skin



**Their rough skin helps them camouflage to look like a log floating in the water.**

**By disguising as logs, they can stalk their prey without being seen.**



# Habitat

1

Alligators are freshwater creatures; they cannot process salty water from the ocean.

2

They live in environments with a low salt content.

3

Alligators only like water that are slow moving.

- They live in places like lakes, rivers, and swamps.

# Heat

- Alligators need a place that provides a good source of heat.
- - They are ectothermic (cold-blooded) and cannot produce their own body heat.
- - External sources such as the sun are used to give them warmth. They will “sunbathe” by basking in the sun.
- - Another way to warm themselves is by digging holes in the mud or swimming in warmer waters.
- Temperatures outside affect their activity level. The hotter it is the more active they are.



# Brumation

- If it's too cold (during winter) alligators will stop hunting and eating and become dormant. This is when the metabolism slows down and they begin a process called **brumation**.
- **Brumation is different from hibernation .**
  - **Alligators do not go to sleep, instead they are fully awake. They just don't do anything.**
  - **They are found in burrows and dens during this time.**

# Diet



Alligators are carnivores just like many other predators, they only eat meat.

They are also opportunistic eaters; they will eat just about anything that gets close enough.

Fish, frogs, birds, turtles, and snakes are the main part of their diet.

## Size of prey:

- If too small, they will swallow it whole.
- If too large, they will shake it into smaller pieces so that it can be easier to swallow.
- If very large they will use a technique called the "Death Roll", which consists of them biting its prey and then spinning, tearing off smaller pieces to swallow.

# Courting and Nesting

When spring season arrives the alligator nesting season begins.

During courting lots of vocalization occurs; bellowing, bubble-making, water slapping, and snout are among the courting behaviors.

When nests are built, they can be as big 2-3 feet high and 3-4 feet wide, it is made up of dirt, sticks, and plant.

- A nest can hold up to 25-38 eggs!  
Good thing the nest is big!

- Eggs can hatch any time from  
August – September.

# Cool Fact!

Temperature can affect the gender of an alligator!

Temperatures at or below 86 F produces only females.

Temperatures in between produces females and males.

Temperatures above 91.4 F produces males.



# Mother and Babies

- Like many parents, female alligators are very protective of their unhatched eggs.
- About 1/3 of nests are destroyed by predators or flooding.
- Females are wary of anything that could cause harm to her babies including humans.
- When the eggs hatch, the baby gators will stay together in a group called a **pod**. They stay in the pod for 3 years.
- Hatchlings are vulnerable to predators. When in trouble the babies will give a distress call that alerts their mother and she will quickly come to aide her baby.
- If you see a baby alligator or a nest with eggs, stay away because a mom may be near and she will defend her nest. This can be dangerous if you are too close.

# Predators

- Alligators have different predators in each life stage.
- Alligator eggs are the most vulnerable and cannot protect themselves.
  - - Raccoons, otters, and bears are some predators that will eat eggs.
  - - Eggs cannot escape flooding.
- Juveniles are also very vulnerable and can fall prey to raccoons, hawks, large fish, and larger alligators!
- Unlike eggs and juveniles, adult alligators do not have many natural predators.
  - - They can still fall prey fall victim to cannibalism of other alligators.
  - - Larger alligators are known to feast on weaker smaller ones.
- Cannibalism has a very positive effect on the population by ensuring the strongest survive and reproduce.



# Threat

Aside from cannibalism, the only other threat to adult alligators is humans.

Humans are known for hunting alligators to use their skin for shoes, purses, and clothing.

Overhunting of alligators in the past created severe population declines.

However, wildlife management practices have been successful at increasing the wild alligator population and they remain stable today.

# Why Are Alligators Important?

Alligators have an extremely important role in the ecosystem.

- Remember the burrows they use for brumation? Once they leave the burrows, it fills with water and becomes drinking holes for other animals.

They are apex predator, meaning they are top of the food chain. Alligators keep small animals from overpopulated.

Without alligators these animals would continue to multiply, and the food chain would be thrown out of equilibrium.


By eating these animals alligators keep the food supply in check!

Keeping the food chain in check goes both ways.


- There are many juveniles that unfortunately will never reach adulthood .
- Baby gators provide food to other animals in the ecosystem.
- Only 5 alligator out of 25-38 eggs will reach adulthood.

# Final Note.

Alligators just want to be left alone. Dangerous human-alligator conflict rarely happen and if it does it means the alligator feel threaten. So, if you see an alligator respect its personal space and don't get too close.



Alligators are a big part of Florida ecosystem, and they are needed in order to make it run smoothly.



By learning more about alligators we can gain a better understanding about their lives and learn to respect all that they do for the environment. In time we can learn to peacefully coexist.