



American Alligator - *Alligator mississippiensis*

The American alligator is a rare success story of an endangered animal. First it was saved from extinction. Now, it is thriving. Alligators have been helped by laws to protect them. Habitat preservation and fewer people buying alligator products have helped. Now the wild population is more than one million.

American Alligators look like scary predators. They have armored lizard-like bodies. They also have muscular tails and powerful jaws. They are ancient looking. Scientists say they are more than 150 million years old. They survived 65 million years ago when the dinosaurs, died off.

American alligators live mostly in the freshwater rivers, lakes, swamps, and marshes of the southeastern United States. Most of them live in Florida and Louisiana.

Out of water Alligators are heavy and clumsy. These reptiles are great swimmers. Males average 10 to 15 feet in length. They can weigh 1,000 pounds. Females grow to a maximum of about 9.8 feet.

Hatchlings are 6 to 8 inches long. They have yellow and black stripes. Juveniles (young gators) are on the menu for dozens of predators. Birds, raccoons, bobcats, and even other alligators eat them. The young usually stay with their mothers for about two years.

Adult alligators are predators at the top of the food chain. They are important to their habitat. They feed mainly on fish, turtles, snakes, and small mammals. However, a hungry gator will eat just about anything, including carrion, pets and, in rare instances, humans.

<http://www.dnr.sc.gov/cwcs/pdf/AmericanAlligator.pdf>

Fast Facts

Type: Reptile

Diet: Carnivore

Average life span in the wild:
35 to 50 years

Size: 10 to 15 ft (3 to 4.6 m)

Weight: 1,000 lbs (453 kg)

Group name: Congregation

Protection status: Recovered

Did you know? The largest American alligator ever reported was supposedly 19.8 ft (6 m) long, although there are doubts about the claim.

Size relative to a 6-ft (2-m) man:

