

American Alligator

(Alligator mississippiensis)



Relatives

Member of the Family Alligatoridae which includes the American crocodile and Spectacled caiman.

Description

Generally black or dark gray with a broad, round snout and long tail that looks armored. Young have bold, yellow cross bands.

Size

6-16ft (1.8-5m)
500-1,000lbs

Habitat

Live in relatively shallow water that is fresh or brackish such as rivers, swamps and marshes. May very rarely be seen in the ocean.

Predators

Eggs may be eaten by raccoons. Within the first 2 years of life, the young may be eaten by birds, raccoons, bobcats, otters, snakes, fish and larger gators. Also eaten by humans.

Diet/Prey

Opportunistic feeders eating just about anything including carrion (dead animals).

Reproduction

In the spring to fall, mainly June, females will build a nest/mound for her eggs that is 4-7ft (1-2m) wide and 18-36in (45-90cm) tall. She will bury about 30 eggs in the nest which incubate for roughly 65 days. The hatchlings are 6-8 inches (21-23cm).

Adaptations

- Females use their strong, powerful, clawed hind legs to build/mound nests of vegetative debris
- Alligators have strong, powerful tails that enable them to move swiftly through the water.
- Alligators have strong, powerful jaws for seizing prey. They have a biting force of 3000 pounds per square inch (psi)!
- Alligators have nostrils on the top of their skulls. This placement allows alligators to sit with just their eyes and nostrils above the surface of the water. This allows them to search for prey, to hide and to breathe simultaneously.
- Alligators have about 80 teeth in their mouth that help them to hold onto prey items. When they wear down their teeth, the teeth are replaced. Alligators are believed to have 2,000-3,000 teeth in a lifetime!
- Alligators have four limbs that allow movement on land and in water.
- Alligators have webbed feet that help them to move swiftly through water.