

The Great American Alligator

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American alligators are a species of crocodylian native to the southeastern United States. Adults can grow up to 16 feet in total length, and are among the largest reptiles in the world. Alligators are carnivorous by nature and are excellent hunters that can sneak up on prey in the water unnoticed. They do this by keeping only the eyes and nostrils above water level and swim slowly towards potential prey until it is close enough to strike. When it does, it uses tremendous jaw strength and numerous sharp teeth to grab the animals and drag them to the water where they will be killed and eaten. Birds, deer and other animals are taken this way, but alligators are also known to eat frogs, turtles, snails, insects and snakes.



Although large and dangerous, alligators surprisingly make good mothers. They mate in spring and begin to build a nest shortly afterward. Using mud and vegetation, a female will construct a mound to which she will lay her clutch of up to 60 eggs. The rotting vegetation helps keep the eggs warm as they incubate for the next couple months. When the eggs hatch, the young alligators will make calls which will lure the mother to help carry them from the nest to the water. The mother may continue to stay with and guard her young from predators for the next 3 years.

In the past, alligators were once considered an endangered species. They were hunted for their skins to make leather, meat for food and out of fear until they were near extinction. Thanks to captive breeding operations however, the great American alligator has made one of the strongest comebacks of any endangered animals. Alligator farms are now set up throughout the deep south, where the crocodylians are raised for the purpose of leather and meat instead of commercial hunting of wild populations.

