

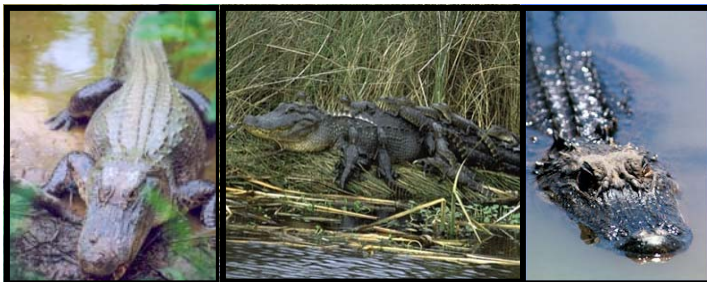


# AMERICAN ALLIGATOR

*Alligator mississippiensis*



American alligators have an armored body, with a muscular flat tail that is used in propelling the animal forward while swimming. The skin on their back is embedded with bony plates called scutes. Nostrils at the end of the snout allow for breathing while the alligator is otherwise fully submerged beneath the water's surface. The large fourth tooth in the lower jaw fits into a socket in the upper jaw and is not visible when the mouth is closed. American alligators have a preference for calm waters. It is believed that this preference has to do with swimming and breathing. In areas of protected water, an American alligator has only to keep its nasal disk above water to breath, whereas in rough water the snout must be at a steeper angle, making it more difficult to swim. Breeding takes place during the night, in shallow waters. When males wish to attract females, they often roar or bellow, emitting subaudible vibrations that can be seen as beads and ripples on the surface of the water. Other courtship rituals include rubbing, blowing bubbles, and vocalizing.



## SPECIES QUICK FACTS

### SIZE

The average length of an adult female American alligator is about 10 feet, while the average length of an adult male ranges from 13 to 15 feet.

### WEIGHT

Large male American alligators can weigh as much as 1,100 lbs.

### FOOD HABITS

American alligators are carnivores. They primarily consume fish, turtles, snakes, and small mammals. When they are young they feed on insects, snails, and small fish.

### HABITAT

American alligators can be found in freshwater swamps, marshes, rivers, lakes, and other calm waters.

### GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION

American alligators are found from the Virginia-North Carolina border, along the Atlantic coast to Florida, and along the Gulf of Mexico as far west as the Rio Grande River in Texas.

### FUN FACT

The temperature at which American alligator eggs develop determines their sex. Those eggs that are incubated at temperatures ranging from 90 to 93 °F turn out to be male, while those incubated at temperatures ranging from 82 to 86 °F end up being female.