

## How to Be SAFE around Alligators: The DO's & DON'Ts

Being safe around alligators only takes a little common sense and a basic understanding of alligator behavior. Still, alligators are large carnivorous predators that demand respect. They can be enjoyed while being observed in the wild by heeding the following steps:

- **Don't feed the alligators:** feeding threatens the safety of both people and animals. Do not feed other animals that inhabit the waters with alligators.
- **Keep your distance:** alligators can move with bursts of speed on land over short distances. A safe distance from an adult should be maintained at 60 feet. If it hisses or lunges at you, you are too close.
- **Do not attempt to move alligators out of the road:** If you see an alligator on the move, leave it alone and let it pass through.
- **It is illegal to harass or throw things at alligators:** Molesting, injuring or killing alligators is punishable by law with fines up to \$2500 and 30 days in jail.
- **Never disturb nests or small alligators:** female alligators protect their young and can become aggressive if provoked.
- **Do not attempt to keep alligators as pets:** Although they start out cute and small, they grow into the large predator that you see outdoors.
- **Keep your pets and children away from alligators:** when they are hungry, alligators act on the hunting instinct and might attempt to feed on your house pet. Keep your pets on a leash & your children away from the waters edge. Splashing can attract alligators that think a prey animal is injured. Be cautious when fishing and avoid heavy vegetation in & around the waters edge.

## Advice to Remember

"Alligators are fascinating creatures and should by all means be enjoyed as part of the natural beauty of our region. But please remember that they are wild animals and should be respected as such. Once they become too familiar with people, they lose their fear of humans, necessitating their removal from the area for the safety of everyone concerned. A few precautions on our part can help both humans and alligators co-exist safely."

~ Dr. J. Whitfield Gibbons ~  
Savannah River Ecology Laboratory  
Director of Outreach

Always be  
"Alligator Safe"  
near the water



DNR

SCDNR - Upper Coastal/Pee Dee Region  
Nuisance Alligator Control Program  
220 Santee Gun Club Road  
McClellanville, SC 29458

Upper Coastal/Pee Dee Region includes;  
Georgetown, Horry, Clarendon, Sumter, Florence,  
Marion, Williamsburg, Dillon, Lee, Darlington,  
Marlboro, Kershaw & Chesterfield Counties



# The American Alligator

(*Alligator mississippiensis*)

Living Among the

## "Modern Day Dinosaurs"

*Safety Tips &  
Facts to Keep in Mind*



### For Nuisance Alligator Concerns

Please contact your HOA, POA or Management Company Representative

You may also contact:

**Morgan Hart**  
Alligator Program Biologist

SCDNR ~ Santee Coastal Reserve WMA  
Ofc: (843) 546-6062 Email: [hartm@dnr.sc.gov](mailto:hartm@dnr.sc.gov) or  
SCDNR Radio Room Dispatch @ 1-800-922-5431  
(after normal business hours)

## American Alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*)

### Description:

The name "alligator" comes from the Spanish "el lagarto," meaning lizard. Alligators are cold-blooded reptiles and are generally black in color with creamy white underbellies. They have rows of rough scales, or scutes, along their backs and large, broad snouts. Juvenile alligators have several yellow and white bands along their bodies. Alligators warm themselves by basking in the sun. This is generally seen when they are on the bank of a body of water. They will open their mouths while basking as a cooling method when they become too warm.



### Distribution & Habitat:

Alligators were once federally listed as an endangered species. This was due in part to a gradual population decline because of habitat loss and poaching. Their status has since been changed to "Threatened upon similarity of appearance" due to their similarity to the American Crocodile. Alligators are common in many areas of the Southeast and can be found from Florida to North Carolina. In South Carolina American Alligators make extensive use of high quality habitat offered by the coastal marshlands. Alligators live in swampy areas, rivers, streams, lakes and ponds. Although they are primarily freshwater animals, alligators will venture into brackish and salt water areas.

#### Fun Facts!

The American Alligator can live up to 50-60 years in the wild.

Alligators & their relatives are the last living reptiles that were closely related to dinosaurs.

### Reproduction & Offspring:

Breeding season for the American alligator coincides with warm weather. With the start of the season in May, males "bellow" to females and other males in the area. Alligator courtship is complex and involves different vocal calls, body posturing, snout & back rubbing, bubble blowing, slapping the surface of the water with their heads, and scent signals. By June pairs have mated, and females begin building ground nests out of nearby vegetation. Late June to mid July the female will lay 20-60 eggs and defend the nest. The incubation period tends to be 63-65 days. When the eggs hatch the female carries her young to the water. Hatchlings begin to feed almost immediately on insects, crustaceans, and snails. Females sometimes aggressively defend their young for more than a year. When an American Alligator reaches 6 feet in length, it is considered an adult. Alligators usually become sexually active when they are 7-9 feet in length.



#### Fun Fact!

There is only one other alligator species, the Chinese Alligator.

### Prey & Food Habits:

Alligators are opportunistic feeders. Adults eat fish, turtles, wading birds, snakes, frogs, small mammals and even smaller alligators they find near the shoreline of their habitat. Alligators are most active and tend to feed between dusk and dawn. Alligators cannot necessarily distinguish their normal prey, such as a raccoon, from a domestic house pet. To an alligator, a splash in the water potentially means a food source. It is a good rule of thumb to keep your pets on leashes and keep your distance from the water's edge, especially during these times.

### Management & Control: NUISANCE Alligators

Nuisance Alligators are animals that exhibit aggressive behaviors to humans or domestic animals, have become habituated to people (from feeding), show symptoms of debilitating illness or injury, or inhabit recreational waters intended primarily for swimming.

Alligators have a strong homing instinct. Therefore, relocating alligators that have been deemed a 'nuisance' is ineffective because they can return home. Also, if they are truly a nuisance in one location, they will be a nuisance in the next location as well.

#### Alligator relocation is illegal in SC.

If an alligator is deemed a nuisance it will need to be "removed", which means it will be killed. In 1989, the SCDNR initiated a Nuisance Alligator Control Program which permits contracted trappers to remove specific individuals.

## REMOVAL PROCEDURE

1. If you have an HOA, POA or management company representative, contact them. They will determine if the animal needs to be removed.
2. If you do not have one of the above, please call the SCDNR Santee Coastal Reserve WMA.
3. Once the animal is determined to be a true nuisance, a Nuisance Alligator Depredation Permit will be issued.
4. The Permit and associated paperwork will be mailed to you along with a tag and instructions for use.
5. Upon receipt of the permit & tag, you or someone you designate can capture and euthanize the animal.
6. After removal, complete the harvest summary included in your packet. Return it with the permit and any unused tags by the date requested.