

What is considered a nuisance alligator?

Not all alligators are considered nuisance alligators. **The mere presence of an alligator does not qualify it as a nuisance, even if it is located in an unexpected place.** Most alligators, if left alone, will move on. Alligators less than 4 feet in length are naturally fearful of humans and are generally not a threat to pets, livestock or humans. Alligators at least 4 feet in length that present a threat to pets, livestock or humans are considered “nuisance” alligators. The following information should help you determine if an alligator may pose a threat to you, your pets/livestock or your property.

Determine Whether an Alligator is a Nuisance

- If the alligator is not approaching people or otherwise posing an obvious threat, wait a few days if possible - even up to a week - before contacting SCDNR. In spring and summer, alligators are moving to breed or find new habitat. Most of the alligators moving around are smaller ones that have been pushed out of their normal habitat by larger alligators. Usually, these smaller alligators will move away in a week or two.
- Alligators have a natural fear of humans, and usually begin a quick retreat when approached by people. If you have a close encounter with an alligator a few yards away, back away slowly. It is extremely rare for wild alligators to chase people but never make the mistake of thinking that an alligator is slow and lethargic. Alligators are extremely quick and agile and will defend themselves when cornered. A female protecting her nest might charge a person who gets close to the nest, but she would quickly return to the nest after the intruder left.
- If you hear an alligator hiss, it's a warning that you are too close and the alligator feels threatened. In some cases, if you spook an alligator out of water, it may quickly spin around and hiss. The same way you would turn and face a threat, if you couldn't escape, the alligator feels threatened and is trying to look intimidating in an effort to scare you away. If you find yourself in any scenario like this, slowly back away and give the alligator a wide berth.
- It is not uncommon for alligators to bask along the banks of a pond or stream for extended periods of time. These alligators are usually warming their bodies; they are not actively hunting. Oftentimes a basking alligator may be seen with its mouth open; this is a way to cool its body temperature down, since alligators do not pant or sweat. An approaching human should cause these alligators to retreat into the water. However, an alligator may be considered a nuisance if it leaves the banks of the water body to spend time near homes, livestock pens, or other structures.
- Frogs, snakes, turtles, fish, ducks and geese are common prey for alligators. An alligator feeding on its natural prey doesn't make it a nuisance.

- If you walk near the water and an alligator comes straight toward you, especially if it comes out of the water, it is definitely a nuisance alligator that needs to be reported to SCDNR. In many cases, these are alligators that have lost their fear of humans. This can be caused by feeding alligators (intentionally or unintentionally) or other reasons.
- If you see an alligator while walking a pet make sure that your pet is on a leash and under your control. Your pet will naturally be curious, and the alligator may see it as an easy food source. Alligators have a keen sense of smell. In areas near alligator sightings it is wise to keep pets inside a fenced area or in the house for a few days, during which the alligator will often move on.
- If you see an alligator in a roadway, yard or other unexpected place, DO NOT attempt to move it! It is not only illegal for the general public to handle or possess alligators but can also be dangerous. If the alligator is not close to water or moving in the direction of water, contact your HOA or SCDNR.
- If you see a large alligator in your favorite swimming hole or pond, do not swim with it. Although alligator attacks in South Carolina are rare, it can happen. The "attack" reports in South Carolina are usually more accurately described as "encounters." As with all outdoor activities, realize that wildlife encounters are a possibility.
- It is not uncommon for alligators to pursue top-water fishing lures or floats (bobbers, corks), and this activity does not constitute a threat to humans. As with fish, alligators are attracted to these lures because they mimic natural food. Most alligators can be easily scared away from boats or fishing lures. However, alligators that repeatedly follow boats, canoes, or other watercraft, and/or maintain a close distance without submersing may be considered nuisance alligators.

How can I report a nuisance alligator?

If you live in a developed community that has a home or property owners association, please call your HOA or POA. They are responsible for managing the alligators on that development.

For an after-hours emergency, call Operation Game Thief at 1-800-922-5431.

If you do not live within a POA or HOA and you have a nuisance alligator, please call the number that corresponds to your county.

(843) 953-9856 (in Charleston)	Berkeley, Charleston and Dorchester counties
(843) 546-6062 (in Georgetown)	Darlington, Dillon, Clarendon, Florence, Georgetown, Horry, Kershaw, Lee, Marion, Marlboro, Sumter and Williamsburg counties
(803) 734-3898 (in Columbia)	Aiken, Allendale, Bamberg, Barnwell, Calhoun, Lexington, Orangeburg, and Richland counties
(803) 625-3569 (in Garnett)	Beaufort, Colleton, Hampton and Jasper counties

DOs and DON'Ts for Living with Alligators

Don't - kill, harass, touch, or attempt to move alligators. State law prohibits such actions, and the potential for being bitten or injured by a provoked alligator is high.

Don't- allow small children to play by themselves in or around water.

Don't- swim at night or during dusk or dawn when alligators most actively feed.

Don't- feed or entice alligators. Alligators overcome their natural shyness and become accustomed or attracted to humans when fed.

Don't- throw fish scraps into the water or leave them on shore. Although you are not intentionally feeding alligators, the end result can be the same.

Don't- remove any alligators from their natural habitat or accept one as a pet. It is a violation of state law to do so. Alligators do not become tame in captivity and handling even small ones may result in bites. In addition, never go near hatchling/young alligators or pick them up. They may seem cute and harmless, but the mother alligator will be nearby, and will protect her clutch for at least two years.

Do- call your HOA or local SCDNR office if you encounter a nuisance gator that has lost its fear of people.

Do- closely supervise children when playing in or around water.

Do- use ordinary common sense and precautions. Swim only during daylight hours.

Do- inform others that feeding alligators creates safety problems for others who want to use the water for recreational purposes.

Do- dispose of fish scraps in garbage cans at most boat ramps or fish camps.

Do- enjoy viewing and photographing wild alligators from a safe distance of at least 50 feet or more.

Do- Remember that alligators are an important part of South Carolina's natural history, as well as an integral component of many wetland ecosystems.