



American Alligator

Alligator mississippiensis

FUN FACT

Alligators have many muscles to help close their mouths, but only a few to open them.

Alligators have changed very little since the prehistoric days. When dinosaurs became extinct, these modern day contemporaries continued to prosper.

There are two true species of alligators: American and Chinese. The Chinese gator is smaller than its American cousin — only growing to 7 ft. in length.

Why are alligators well adapted to aquatic life?

- Alligators have powerful tails that rapidly propel them through water.
- Alligators have eyes and nostrils set high on their head so they may lie in wait for their prey with the rest of their body submerged.
- Alligators have cone-shaped teeth which make it easier to catch slippery fish and other wetland creatures.



Fact or Fairy Tale?



Alligators are good mothers...Fact!

Alligator mothers are known to protect their offspring for up to a year. They will even place their offspring in their mouths to carry them to safety.



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Alligator mississippiensis

Habitat: Brackish and salt water, swamps, bayous, rivers, lakes and other bodies of fresh water

Range: North Carolina to Florida and west to the lower Rio Grande



Conservation Status

Threatened: Concerted conservation efforts have brought the American alligator back from the brink of extinction, and it is no longer an endangered species.

FUN FACT

Alligators have 80 teeth in their mouth at one time. When the teeth wear down they are replaced. Thus, an alligator can go through 2,000-3,000 teeth in a lifetime.

The name *alligator* was derived from the Spanish words *el lagarto*, meaning "the lizard," which is what Spanish explorers called these creatures.



Fact or Fairy Tale?



Alligators live for hundreds of years...

...Fairy Tale. Alligators in the wild are believed to live 35-50 years. In captivity their life span may be longer, perhaps 60-80 years. Currently, there are no scientific methods of analyzing an alligator's age while it is alive.



Alligators can grow to over 20 feet in length and weigh a ton or more...

Fairy Tale. The longest recorded length for an alligator is 19' 2".

This animal was trapped in the early 1900s in Louisiana. Most wild alligators do not get above 13 feet in length, and may weigh 600 pounds or more.