

Alligators are only  
native to the united  
states and china



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American alligators are found in the southeast United States: all of Florida and Louisiana, the southern parts of Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi, coastal South and North Carolina, Eastern Texas, the southeast corner of Oklahoma and the southern tip of Arkansas. According to the 2005 Scholastic Book of World Records, Louisiana is the state with the largest alligator population. The majority of American alligators inhabit Florida and Louisiana, with over a million alligators in each state. Southern Florida is the only place where both alligators and crocodiles live side by side.

American alligators live in freshwater environments, such as ponds, marshes, wetlands, rivers, lakes, and swamps, as well as in brackish environments. When they construct gator holes in the wetlands, they increase plant diversity and also provide habitat for other animals during drought periods. They are therefore considered an important species for maintaining ecological diversity in wetlands. Further west, in Louisiana, heavy grazing by nutria and muskrat are causing severe damage to coastal wetlands. Large alligators feed extensively on nutria, and provide a vital ecological service by reducing nutria numbers.

The Chinese alligator currently is found only in the Yangtze River valley and is extremely endangered, with only a few dozen believed to be left in the wild. Indeed, far more Chinese alligators live in zoos around the world than can be found in the wild. Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge in southern Louisiana has several in captivity in an attempt to preserve the species. Miami MetroZoo in Florida also has a breeding pair of Chinese alligators. The St. Augustine Alligator Farm Zoological Park has successfully reproduced Chinese Alligators and been fortunate enough to release some of their

offspring back into the wild in China. citation needed] Behavior Large male alligators are solitary territorial animals.

Smaller alligators can often be found in large numbers close to each other. The largest of the species (both males and females), will defend prime territory; smaller alligators have a higher tolerance of other alligators within a similar size class. Although alligators have a heavy body and a slow metabolism, they are capable of short bursts of speed, especially in very short lunges. Alligators' main prey are smaller animals that they can kill and eat with a single bite.

Alligators may kill larger prey by grabbing it and dragging it into the water to drown. Alligators consume food that can not be eaten in one bite by allowing it to rot, or by biting and then spinning or convulsing wildly until bite-size chunks are torn off. This is referred to as a " death roll. " Critical to the alligator's ability to initiate a death roll, the tail must flex to a significant angle relative to its body. An alligator with an immobilized tail cannot perform a death roll. Most of the muscle in an alligator's jaw evolved to bite and grip prey.

The muscles that close the jaws are exceptionally powerful, but the muscles for opening their jaws are comparatively weak. As a result, an adult human can hold an alligator's jaws shut barehanded. It is common today to use several wraps of duct tape to prevent an adult alligator from opening its jaws when handled or transported. Alligators are generally timid towards humans and tend to walk or swim away if one approaches. This has led some people to the practice of approaching alligators and their nests in a manner that may provoke the animals into attacking.

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In the state of Florida, it is illegal to feed wild alligators at any time. If fed, the alligators will eventually lose their fear of humans and will learn to associate humans with food, thereby becoming a greater danger to people.

**Diet** The type of food eaten by alligators depends upon their age and size. When young, alligators eat fish, insects, snails, crustaceans, and worms. As they mature, progressively larger prey is taken, including larger fish such as gar, turtles, various mammals, particularly nutria and muskrat, as well as birds, deer and other reptiles.

Their stomachs also often contain gizzard stones. They will even consume carrion if they are sufficiently hungry. In some cases, larger alligators are known to ambush dogs, Florida panther and black bears, making it the apex predator throughout its distribution. In this role as a top predator, it may determine the abundance of prey species including turtles and nutria. As humans encroach onto their habitat, attacks are few but not unknown. Alligators, unlike the large crocodiles, do not immediately regard a human upon encounter as prey, but may still attack in self-defense if provoked.