

The sex of hatchlings is determined by incubation temperatures during the first 10 days of embryo development. Warmer internal nest temperatures (above 89° F) usually produce all males while cooler temperatures (below 87° F) produce both sexes or all females.

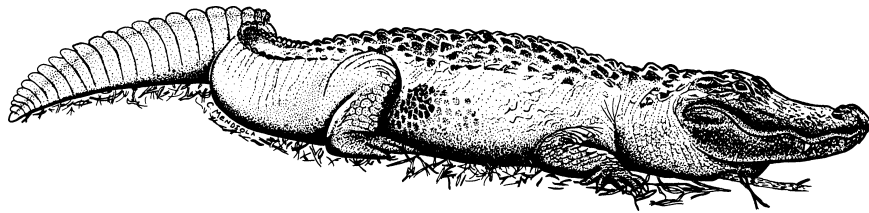
Young alligators feed on insects, snails, frogs, small fish, crayfish, crabs and freshwater shrimp.

In captivity, female alligators may reach 30 years of age, however, males can live past 60!

The longest documented alligator was taken in 1890 from Louisiana. It measured 19 feet 2 inches and probably weighted near 2,000 pounds.

In Texas, the largest wild alligator harvested since the reopening of the season was a male, measuring 14 feet 4 inches taken near West Columbia, in Jackson County.

Estimated alligator numbers in Jefferson, Chambers, and Orange counties combined total 283,263 alligators of all sizes classes.



For more information feel free to contact the alligator program at (409) 736-2551, Texas Parks and Wildlife, 10 Parks and Wildlife Drive, Port Arthur, Texas 77640.

Suggested Reading:

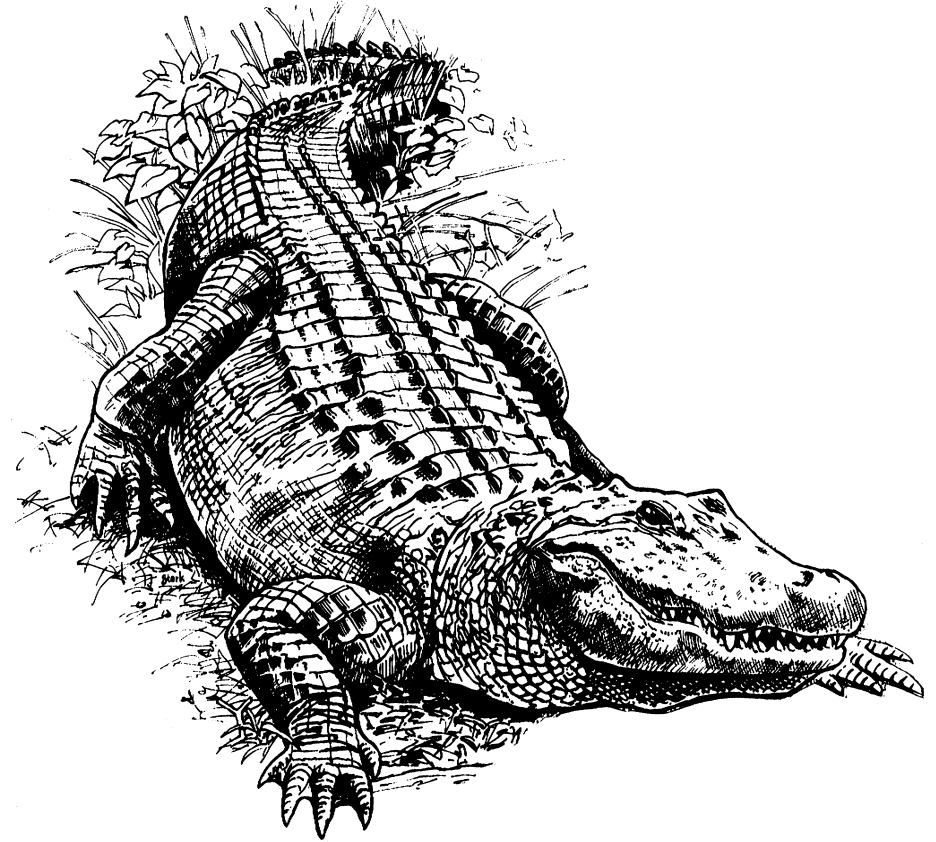
The American Alligator, by Steve Potts.

Wonders of Alligators and Crocodiles, by Wyatt Blassingame.

The Alligator – Monarch of the Marsh, by Connie Toops.

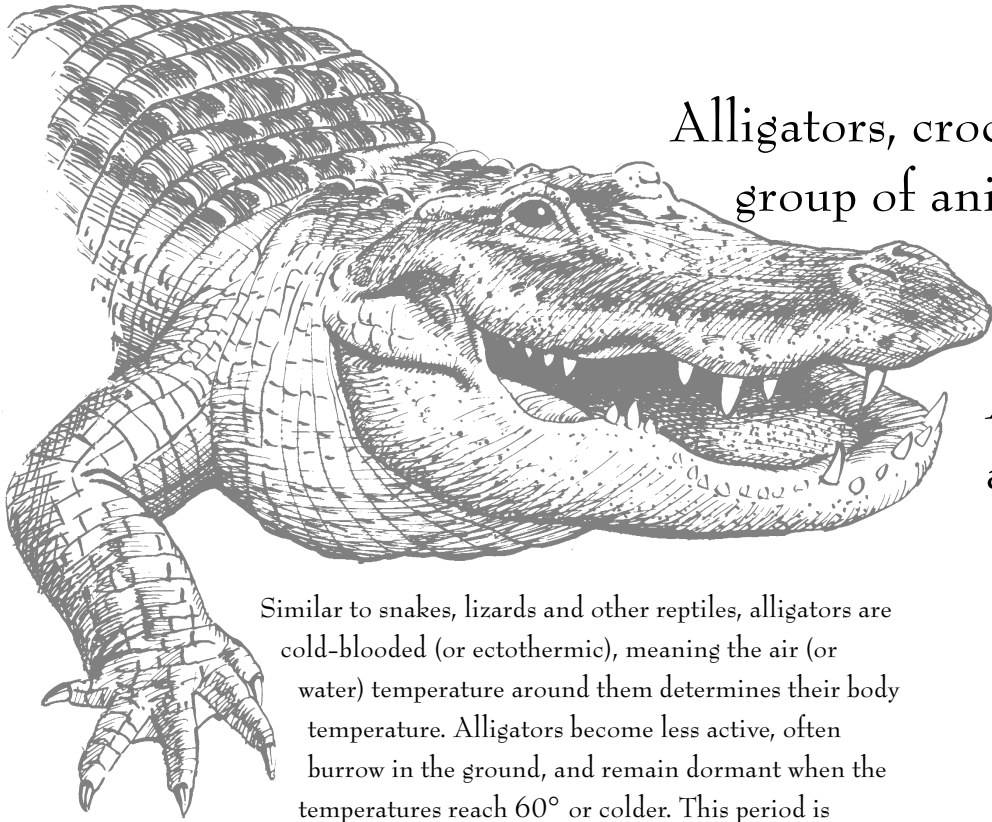
A Social History of the American Alligator, by Vaughn L. Glasgow.

Crocodiles & Alligators, by John Cloudsley-Thompson.



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Alligators, crocodiles, and gharials make up the group of animals known as crocodylians.

Crocodylians are the world's largest reptiles. The American alligator or *Alligator mississippiensis* is the least aggressive crocodylian.

Similar to snakes, lizards and other reptiles, alligators are cold-blooded (or ectothermic), meaning the air (or water) temperature around them determines their body temperature. Alligators become less active, often burrow in the ground, and remain dormant when the temperatures reach 60° or colder. This period is referred to as aestivation.

Crocodylians have a larger brain than most reptiles, but in general the brain of a reptile is much smaller than those of mammals.

Alligators have excellent sight, smell and hearing. They are very good at stalking their prey without being seen.

Alligators have two sets of eyelids. One set is much like ours, closing from top to bottom and a second set, which is transparent, closes from front to rear; this set is known as a nictitating membrane.

Alligator jaw muscles have little strength for opening their mouth, but the muscles that shut them are very strong and have awesome force, about 300 pounds per square inch in an adult.

Alligators do not require as much food as we do. In the summer a large alligator may only eat once or twice a week.

A mature alligator has 80 conical shaped teeth. They have no molars for crushing and grinding food therefore they swallow their food whole. Lost teeth are replaced. An alligator may go through 2,000 to 3,000 teeth in its lifetime.

Large adult alligators can hold their breath up to 45 minutes. The amount of time they can remain submerged depends upon their size and the water temperature.

Alligators mate once a year during the spring breeding season. Male alligators make loud throaty bellowing roars to attract females.

Females seldom reach over 9 feet in length, while males may reach 14 feet.

Female alligators lay their eggs during June to early July.

The female alligator builds her nest above ground. The nest acts like a giant incubator. Decomposition of the nest material and sunlight produce heat to warm the eggs.

A nest may contain 15 to 60 eggs carefully layed in several layers of marsh vegetation. The eggs hatch in about two months.

The eggs in a nest are referred to as clutch. Baby alligators (hatchlings) have a pointed "egg tooth" or a caruncle to help them break out of their shell. This tooth is soon lost after hatching. Hatchlings are about 8 inches long. A group of hatchlings is called a pod. Baby alligators grunt when separated from the female, when hungry, when the temperature changes or when they are afraid.