



Gator Safety

Alligators and Arkansans can live together safely if people follow a few simple guidelines and use common sense.

If an alligator is crossing a road, give it room to continue; the closer you get, the more likely the alligator is to stop. Keep your distance when watching alligators and don't allow children or pets in or near water in alligator habitat. Dispose of fish entrails properly.

Report alligator problems to the nearest AGFC office:

Brinkley.....	877-734-4581
Camden.....	877-836-4612
Fort Smith.....	877-478-1043
Hope.....	877-777-5580
Jonesboro.....	877-972-5438
Mayflower.....	877-470-3650
Monticello.....	877-367-3559
Russellville.....	877-967-7577



Arkansas Game and Fish Commission

2 Natural Resources Drive

Little Rock, AR 72205

501-223-6300

www.agfc.com

American Alligator



Native Species

When Europeans arrived in Arkansas, American alligators ranged from Little Rock to Memphis, throughout the Mississippi River floodplain and west across the Coastal Plain, south of a line from Benton to Arkadelphia to Nashville. The northern limit of their range is controlled by long periods of freezing weather, which they can't handle. Alligators dig dens into the banks of swamps, marshes, sloughs, bayous or levees to avoid freezing temperatures during Arkansas winters.

The Arkansas alligator population tumbled between 1860-1960 because of unregulated hunting and draining of wetlands. Arkansas began protecting alligators in 1961 and federal regulations were established in 1967. The American alligator became an endangered species under the Endangered Species Act in 1973, and was removed from the list in 1987 after numbers rebounded.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regulates alligators, which are listed as "threatened due to similarity of appearance" because of international trading of crocodile meat and hides. Wild alligators cannot be fed, harassed, possessed or killed under Arkansas Game and Fish Commission regulations.

The AGFC released about 2,800 wild-caught Louisiana alligators throughout their range in Arkansas from 1972-84. About 80 percent of the transplants were released on private land at the request of landowners.

Alligators now range as far northwest as Petit Jean Wildlife Management Area, and as far northeast as the St. Francis River near Paragould. They eat anything they can overpower and swallow, including dragonflies, shellfish, crayfish, snails, fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals.

Bulls and Cows

Alligators, which grow throughout their lives, reach a maximum length of about 12 feet in Arkansas. The largest known alligator from Arkansas was a 13-footer from Hempstead County. Females, which are smaller than males, reach 8-9 feet. Alligators are sexually mature in 12-16 years, when they are 6-7 feet long. Mating begins in late April and runs through May.

Adult males – "bulls" – bellow from swamps and marshes each spring. They inflate their lungs, arch their head and tail above the surface, and roar to challenge rival males. Females – "cows" – lay 30-45 eggs in a mound of soil and vegetation 2-3 feet high and 5-6 feet wide by July 1. They remain near their nests for 65 days to guard against predators such as raccoons, opossums and feral hogs.

When the young hatch in September, they begin to yelp. Females open their nests and carry their young in their mouth to the nearest water. The young stay with their mothers until the following spring.

Lunch Break

Alligators don't feed between October and March. They bask on warm fall and winter days, but they don't feed because they can't digest food at low temperatures.

Alligator populations are greatest in shallow, open marshes, swamps and river backwaters with plenty of aquatic plants.

Alligators play an important role in wetland ecosystems. They help maintain a balance in wildlife populations and their "gator holes" are refuges for fish and aquatic wildlife during droughts. Alligators do not threaten sport fish or wildlife; in fact, they help maintain healthy populations by preying on sick or diseased animals.

Human Element

Since many Arkansans grew up without seeing alligators in the wild, most human-alligator encounters result in nuisance alligator complaints. All nuisance alligator complaints are directed to an AGFC nuisance alligator coordinator who assesses each report.

Two alligator bites have been reported in Arkansas in recent years. One person accidentally stepped on a 4-footer while duck hunting and the animal defensively bit into his waders. The other incident was not an accident. A couple of fellows gigging bullfrogs came across a 2- to 3-foot gator. They thought it would be fun to catch the animal, but it bit one of them.

The AGFC has no record of an unprovoked attack or a death from an alligator.

After 20 years of protection, the alligator population has been re-established throughout its range. They are widely distributed in low densities. Concentrations of alligators are limited to specific areas with high-quality habitat. Arkansas Post National Memorial in southern Arkansas County and Millwood Reservoir west of Hope are good places to watch wild alligators. A permit alligator hunt during two weekends in September began in 2007.

If you happen to encounter an alligator the next time you are enjoying The Natural State, appreciate this Arkansas original.

