

AMERICAN ALLIGATOR

Alligator mississippiensis



Order: Crocodylia
Family: Alligatoridae
FNAI Ranks: G5/S4
U.S. Status: none
FL Status: none

Description: A large, mostly black crocodylian with a broadly rounded snout. Young with yellow crossbands on back, tail, and sides; throat and belly white to creamy yellow at all ages. Head smooth in front of eyes; no prominently visible tooth in lower jaw when mouth is closed. Adults 6 -15 ft. (1.8 - 4.6 m); hatchlings about 9 in. (230 mm).

Similar Species: Spectacled caiman (*Caiman crocodilus*), introduced in southern Florida, shares broadly rounded snout but rarely exceeds 6 ft. (1.8 m) and has curved bony crosswise ridge in front of eyes; varies from yellow-green to gray-brown with dark crossbands. American crocodile (*Crocodylus acutus*; see species account) is gray to brown and has long, tapered snout with prominently projecting fourth lower tooth when mouth is closed (except in very young).

Habitat: Most permanent bodies of fresh water, including marshes, swamps, lakes, and rivers. Occasionally wanders into brackish and salt water but rarely remains there.

Seasonal Occurrence: Most active from spring through fall, with nesting in late spring and hatching in summer. Inactive during cold weather, though some may bask on sunny winter days.

Florida Distribution: Statewide, though less common in the Panhandle than the peninsula.

Range-wide Distribution: Southeastern Coastal Plain from North Carolina to Texas.

Conservation Status: Has recovered dramatically since 1960s. Populations are present on most federal, state, and private conservation lands where there is permanent fresh water. Several populations are now large enough to support controlled harvest. Threats include destruction and pollution of wetlands,

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including lakes and rivers.

Protection and Management: Maintain the ecological integrity of freshwater wetlands. Protect from pollution, drainage, and other disturbances. Species can tolerate harvest of eggs and of all age classes to a limited extent, but this needs to be closely monitored.

References: Ashton and Ashton 1991, Bartlett and Bartlett 1999, Conant and Collins 1991, Deitz and Hines 1980, Delany and Abercrombie 1986, Kushlan 1974, Lazell 1989, Mount 1975, Neill 1971.



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juvenile © Jim Solomon