

# Alligator



Figure 1: American alligators can often be seen in the swamps of the southeastern United States.

## Introduction

Alligators are large lizardlike animals with long, rounded snouts and powerful tails. They spend most of their time in the water, but they also travel on land. Alligators belong to the group of animals called reptiles. They are related to crocodiles.

## Where Alligators Live

Alligators live along the edges of swamps, lakes, and slow-moving rivers. There are two species, or types, of alligator. The American alligator lives in the southeastern United States. The Chinese alligator lives in the Yangtze River region in China. It is very rare.

## Physical Features

Male American alligators measure about 11 feet (3.4 meters) in length on average. The females are slightly smaller. Young American alligators are black with yellow stripes on the tail. The adults are brownish.

The Chinese alligator normally grows to a length of about 5 feet (1.5 meters). It is blackish with faint yellowish markings.

Alligators have many features in common with crocodiles. They have thick skin composed of many scales and plates. They each have a long body and four short legs. The eyes, ears, and nostrils are located on top of the head. These show above the water when the animal floats.

However, there are easy ways to tell alligators and crocodiles apart. One of the most obvious is that alligators have broad, rounded snouts, while most crocodiles have narrow, pointed snouts.

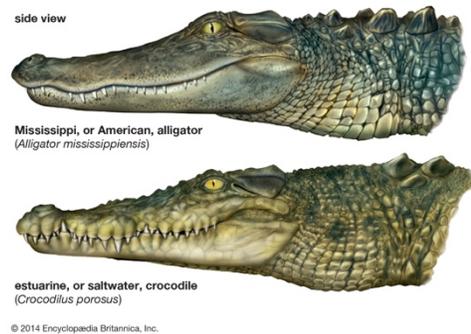


Figure 2: Crocodiles and alligators both have long snouts. But crocodiles have large teeth that stick out when the mouth is closed.

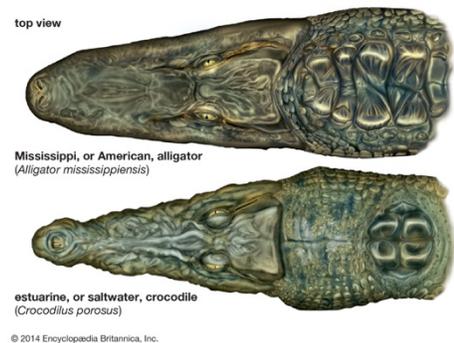


Figure 3: A view from above shows the different snouts of an alligator and a crocodile.



Figure 4: A baby alligator sits on top of an egg.

## ***Behavior***

Alligators eat mainly fish, small mammals, and birds. But they sometimes kill prey as large as deer or cattle.

Alligators usually mate during the spring. The female builds a nest of mud and grass. She lays 20 to 60 white eggs in the nest. The eggs hatch after about 65 days. The young alligators live with their mother for as long as a year.

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