

How Much Do You Know About Alligators?

Alligators are true survivors. Not only have they survived through millions of years, but they have managed to survive man's onslaught as well. In 1967, the alligator was listed as an endangered species (under a law that preceded the Endangered Species Act of 1973), meaning it was considered in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range. The Endangered Species Act prohibited alligator hunting, allowing the species to rebound in numbers in many areas where it had been depleted. Alligators were downlisted from endangered to threatened in 1977, and in 1987, the American alligator was reclassified by the US Fish and Wildlife Service as threatened.

1. The name alligator comes from the Spanish words el lagarto which means "the lizard." The name was used by early Spanish explorers.

- True
- False

2. The first alligator hunters were Seminole Indians who didn't have guns to kill their prey. They were very efficient at making use of every part of the body.

- True
- False

3. Alligators can be found primarily in manmade wetlands and swamps, including canals, swimming pools, and ponds on golf courses.

- True
- False

4. Baby alligators grow about three inches per month in the wild. It takes a hatchling four to five years to become a five-foot-long adult alligator.

- True
- False

5. Alligators live in salt-free and pollution-free water. They eat mostly fish and small animals, though they will eat nutria or deer if they come to the water.

- True
- False

6. American alligators are sluggish and slow. They don't move very fast.

- True
- False

7. The American alligator likes to move around a lot. It meanders from swamp to swamp, and shares territories with other alligators.

- True
- False

8. The American alligator is camouflaged. It's a greenish brown color to blend in with the swamp water in which it lives.

- True
- False

9. Between 1938 to 1958, Louisiana lost 90 percent of its alligators due to hunting by men.

- True
- False

10. The alligator became endangered when humans started draining the swamps in the southeastern states. But the real trouble started when alligator skin products went on the market. Between 1930 and 1940 1 million alligators were killed in Florida alone.

- True
- False

11. The American alligator has many predators in the wild.

- True
- False

12. In 1941, Alabama became the first state to protect alligators. It had almost no alligators left within its boundaries due to over-hunting.

- True
- False

13. Today there are more than one million alligators in Louisiana alone, though many can be found on alligator farms. Farmed alligators are harvested for their meat, but also for their skins, which are used for shoes, purses and belts.

- True
- False

14. Alligators dramatically affect the appearance of the landscape. They dig gator holes, which support a whole community of other creatures and plants. By building up the land around the gator holes, they create new places for plants to grow. They also help control populations of many nuisance animals.

All answers are true except 3, 6, 9 and 11.

3. False. Alligators are at home in natural wetlands and swamps – as far away from humans as possible.

6. False. Alligators have been clocked swimming as fast as 25 mph.

7. False. The American alligator is territorial. It needs its own space because it requires a lot of food. It always goes back to its area after mating.

11. False. Alligators have only one predator – man.