

Alligator Safety Questions

Alligators are large predators. They should always be respected as such. Humans are not a natural prey source for alligators, but they can occasionally confuse people for other animals. As with any wild animal, do not approach or try to interact.

We all know to "keep your distance" from an alligator, what do you think is a safe distance between a person and an alligator?

- There is no perfect distance, it will always depend on the situation. However, staying at least 10 feet from the water's edge, whether you see an alligator or not, is a good starting point. If you see an alligator, stay alert and aware and do not approach it.

Do alligators typically hunt on land or do they mostly attack while in water? Is it typical for an alligator to come up on land and approach its prey?

- Alligators do not hunt on land. They are ambush predators and use camouflage to stay hidden and submerged in water to quietly approach prey. An alligator on land is generally laying in the sun to warm their body temperature ('basking'). When on land they feel exposed and at risk and may be more likely to act defensively if approached.

How do alligators typically attack/hunt? Do they always drown their prey?

- Alligators eat everything from small frogs and snakes to turtles, birds, fish, and mammals like raccoons, opossums, and even occasionally deer. They generally hold their prey in their very strong jaws and swim to deeper water. If the prey struggles, they may roll in order to immobilize the prey.

Does SCDNR keep track of how many pets (cats and dogs) are killed by alligators every year?

- SCDNR does not keep a record of pet involved incidents. Pets are easily mistaken by alligators for other natural prey. This is one reason it is important to stay alert when walking your pets near water and to keep a safe distance from the water's edge.

What does SCDNR do to manage alligators?

- SCDNR's alligator management program seeks to minimize conflict between people and alligators. Ideally, alligators should be able to coexist with people, though sometimes this is not the case. We work closely with communities and members of the public to provide education regarding alligator safety and provide signage designed to alert the public to the potential presence of alligators. We provide nuisance alligator tags and permits to communities and property owners for the removal of nuisance alligators so that they can manage their properties. Additionally, we utilize contracted Alligator Control Agents to provide timely responses to emergency nuisance alligator calls.

Why can't I feed alligators?

- Feeding alligators is illegal and can result in animals that associate people with food, which increases the likelihood of negative interactions. No one should feed an alligator, whether intentionally or unintentionally (feeding turtles/fish where alligators are present, cleaning fish over water, etc.)

Are alligators more aggressive during mating season? What do residents/visitors need to know about alligators during mating season?

- Alligators are more mobile during mating season, which can increase the likelihood of encountering one on land or in a new area. Again, remain aware of your surroundings, and if you encounter an alligator remain calm, do not approach the alligator, do not move between the alligator and the nearest body of water, and if the alligator seems disturbed by your presence, move away from the alligator.

How do DNR officers determine whether or not alligators are a nuisance animal/when it is necessary to kill the alligator?

- Generally, "nuisance" alligators are found in typical alligator habitat where the property owner or member of the public demands its removal. These alligators may have been habituated to people, have been fed by people, or may not exhibit appropriate fear of humans, though this is not always the case. Each situation is unique and there are numbers to call for each region of the state for guidance and to report nuisance alligators.

What should you do if you encounter an alligator while on a run?

- Remain aware of your surroundings, stay away from the water's edge, and if you encounter an alligator, keep a respectful distance.

Do alligators chase humans? People always say "run in zig zags"

- Generally, alligators do not chase people. Since alligators feel more vulnerable on land, the two most likely scenarios for an alligator moving toward you are: you are either between the alligator and the water (where it feels safest) or you are too close and the alligator is trying to scare you away. Alligators will open their mouth, hiss, and move forward about a foot or two if they feel particularly threatened (this is called a 'bluff lunge'). Move away from the alligator and the water and the alligator will calm down and move away from you and towards the water.