

Sea Pines

COMMUNITY SERVICES ASSOCIATES

Living with Alligators



Alligators Live in Sea Pines! Alligators range from North Carolina to Texas and can be generally found between the fall line and the coast. You should assume that every body of water contains an alligator. Alligators have adapted to living in Sea Pines and other communities and normally do not present a threat to humans. While people are fascinated with these modern day dinosaurs, they are large carnivorous predators that can be dangerous and should be respected as such. Understanding alligator food habits, life history and behavior is essential to our safe co-existence.

American alligator
(Alligator mississippiensis)

Food Habits

Alligators are opportunistic predators and feed on a variety of prey items found in the water or at the water's edge.

Smaller alligators (< 6 feet) will consume insects, frogs, and small fish, while larger alligators will eat wading birds, small mammals, fish, turtles and even other alligators. Very large alligators may occasionally consume larger mammals such as deer. Alligators may be unable to distinguish natural prey from pets and even people, so never enter the water and always keep your distance from the water's edge. To an alligator, a splash means a food source may be near.



Life History

Male and female alligators are identical in appearance. In Sea Pines, mature females are typically 7-9 feet in length, while males are 8-12 feet. Breeding begins in the spring and about a month later the female will lay 30-50 eggs in a nest constructed by mounding mud and vegetation together. The eggs are kept warm by the decomposing vegetation and hatch approximately 60 days later. The female will aggressively guard the nest and protect the young after they emerge. Hatchlings will grow 6-8 inches per year and reach sexual maturity 10-12 years later when they are 6-8 feet in length. Alligators can live 50-60 years in the wild.



Behavior

Alligators are cold blooded and cannot regulate their temperature as humans do. For this reason, alligators are most active when temperatures are above 70°F and will become dormant when temperatures fall below 55°F. They are often seen basking along waterways to increase their body temperature, especially during cooler weather. If an alligator becomes too warm while basking, it may open its mouth to cool off. During the heat of the summer, alligators maintain an optimal body temperature by spending the majority of their time in the water. Feeding or harassing an alligator is dangerous and illegal and can cause the alligator to exhibit aggressive behavior.

Signs of Aggressive Alligator Behavior or Situations You Should Report:

- Closely approaches humans or pets
- Consistently follows fishermen or pursues hooked fish
- Displays aggression towards humans or pets, including changes in body posture, hissing or slapping tail on water
- You observe an alligator away from water/in an unusual place (e.g. yards, driveways)
- You observe people feeding or harassing alligators
- You observe people approaching alligators too closely (within 60 feet or 4 car lengths)

Immediately call Sea Pines Security at 843-671-7170 to report concerns!





Important Safety Tips

- Assume every body of water contains an alligator
- Stay at least 60 feet (4 car lengths) away from alligators
- Alligators are ambush predators and can move faster than you or your pets
- Keep pets and children away from water's edge
- Swimming or wading is prohibited in Sea Pines' waterways
- Feeding or harassing alligators is dangerous and illegal
- Use caution when fishing or crabbing. Do not throw used bait or fish parts into the water

FAQs

- How many alligators live in Sea Pines?
 - Sea Pines is home to a healthy population of alligators, but the exact number is not known. Assume every body of water in Sea Pines contains an alligator.
- What do alligators eat?
 - Alligators have a widely varied diet, influenced primarily by their size. Smaller alligators (< 6 feet) will consume insects, frogs and small fish while larger alligators will eat wading birds, small mammals, fish, turtles and even other alligators. Very large alligators are capable of catching larger mammals such as deer.
- Can some natural alligator behavior be potentially dangerous?
 - Yes. Female alligators will aggressively guard their nests and protect hatched young for up to several months. Generally, the female is just trying to scare the intruder away, but you can avoid negative interactions by keeping a distance of at least 60 feet (4 car lengths). Should you observe aggressive alligator behavior, please call Sea Pines Security immediately at 843-671-7170.
- What causes an alligator to associate humans with food?
 - Illegal feeding. Fed alligators can create dangerous situations and may have to be removed and destroyed. Sea Pines CSA typically removes 5-10 nuisance alligators per year under the state's Nuisance Alligator Program.
- Where can I see an alligator?
 - Alligators can be seen throughout Sea Pines, but they prefer waterways that are freshwater/slightly brackish over those that are more brackish/salt water. In the spring and fall, look for alligators basking on the bank. During the heat of the summer look early or late in the day. Stay at least 60 feet (4 car lengths) away from alligators. Bring binoculars!
- What should I do if I have a safety concern about an alligator or people around an alligator?
 - Immediately call Sea Pines Security at 843-671-7170.

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What is a nuisance alligator?

The mere presence of an alligator does not qualify it as nuisance. Individual alligators are determined to be nuisance after a behavior assessment suggests the alligator presents a threat to pets or humans. Nuisance alligators cannot be relocated and will be removed and destroyed.

**Immediately Call Sea Pines Security at 843-671-7170
to report any aggressive alligator behavior or concerns.**