

Topic Page: [Alligators](#)

Definition: **alligator** from *Philip's Encyclopedia*

Broad-snouted crocodylian reptile found only in the USA and China. *Alligator mississippiensis* is found in the SE USA; it grows up to 5.8m (19ft) long. The endangered Chinese alligator, *A. sinensis*, is restricted to the Yangtze-Kiang river basin. Length: up to 1.5m (5ft). Family Alligatoridea.



Summary Article: **alligator**

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

Image from:

[Crocodiles and Alligators in Animals: A Visual Encyclopedia](#)

large aquatic reptile of the genus *Alligator*, in the same order as the crocodile. There are two species—a large type found in the S United States and a small type found in E China. Alligators differ from crocodiles in several ways. They have broader, blunter snouts, which give their heads a triangular appearance; also, the lower fourth tooth does not protrude when the mouth is closed, as it does in the crocodile.

The **American alligator**, *Alligator mississippiensis*, is found in swamps and sluggish streams from North Carolina to Florida and along the Gulf Coast. When young, it is dark brown or black with yellow transverse bands. The bands fade as the animal grows, and the adult is black. Males commonly reach a length of 10 to 13 ft (3 to 4 m) and an average weight of 500 lbs (225 kg); females are smaller (8.2 ft/2.6 m). Males 18 ft (5.4 m) long were once fairly common, but intensive hunting for alligator leather eliminated larger individuals and threatened the species as a whole. The wild American alligator is now protected by law, but it is also raised on farms for commercial uses.

Alligators spend the day floating just below the surface of the water or resting on the bank, lying in holes in hot weather. They hunt by night, in the water and on the bank. Young alligators feed on water insects, crustaceans, frogs, and fish; as they grow they catch proportionally larger animals. Large alligators may occasionally capture deer and cows as they come to drink; they do not commonly attack humans. Alligators hibernate from October to March. In summer the female builds a nest of rotting vegetation on the bank and deposits in it 20 to 70 eggs, which she guards for 9 to 10 weeks until they hatch.

The **Chinese alligator**, *A. sinensis*, which grows to about 6 ft (1.8 m) long, is found in the Chang (Yangtze) River valley near Shanghai. This species is nearly extinct. **Caimans** are similar, but distinct members of the Alligatoridae family found in Central and South America. There are several species, classified in three genera. The largest grow up to 15 ft (4.8 m) long. Unlike alligators, caimans have bony overlapping scales on their bellies. Baby caimans are often sold in the United States as baby alligators.

Alligators and caimans are classified in the phylum Chordata, subphylum Vertebrata, class Reptilia, order Crocodylia, family Alligatoridae.

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alligator. (2018). In P. Lagasse, & Columbia University, *The Columbia encyclopedia* (8th ed.). New York, NY: Columbia University Press. Retrieved from <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/alligator>



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