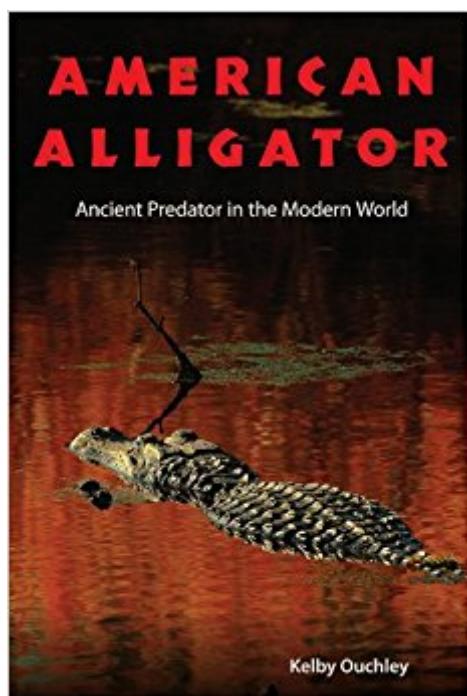


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American Alligator: Ancient Predator In The Modern World



Synopsis

From prehistoric relatives to post-endangered status, Ouchley provides a comprehensive review of the alligator, an iconic southern creature. Michael K. Steinberg, author of *Stalking the Ghost Bird* “The conservation of the American alligator is one of history’s best examples of the sustainable-use model for wildlife conservation. The effort to preserve the alligator has contributed to the conservation of wetlands and many other wetland-dependent species throughout its range. Ouchley does an outstanding job of explaining the mysteries of this keystone species.” Robert Barham, Secretary of Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries “Kelby Ouchley is part of a generation of wildlife professionals that helped bring the American alligator back from the brink of extinction. He provides fascinating insights into its fight for survival.” Jim Kurth, Chief of National Wildlife Refuge System, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Having survived since the Mesozoic era, alligators teetered on the brink of extinction in the 1960s. Their recovery in the 1970s and 1980s was largely due to legislative intervention, and today populations are closely monitored throughout their range. *American Alligator* is the most up-to-date and comprehensive treatment of this resilient relic, a creature with a brain weighing less than half an ounce that has successfully adapted to a changing Earth for more than 200 million years. Kelby Ouchley chronicles the evolution of *Alligator mississippiensis* from “shieldcroc” the last common ancestor of modern-day alligators, crocodiles, caimans, and the gharial to its current role as keystone of the ecological health of America’s southern swamps and marshes. In Florida, the apex predator uses its snout and feet to clear muck from holes in the limestone bedrock. During the dry season, these small ponds or “alligator holes” provide refuge, food, and water for a variety of wildlife. In Louisiana, millions of dollars are spent on the bounty of the non-native nutria that overgraze marsh vegetation, but alligators prey on these coastal rodents free of charge. Today only twenty-three species of crocodilians remain. That the alligator lineage survives at all, having successfully weathered millions of years of environmental change, speaks to an impressive degree of fitness and adaptability. The loss of the American alligator would be a blow to biodiversity and an ecosystem disruption affecting all levels of the food chain. While the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service removed it from the endangered species list in 1987 and today regulates the legal trade of the animal and its products, Ouchley cautions us not to forget the lessons learned: human activities, from urban development to energy production, can still threaten the future of the gator and its southern wetland habitat.

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Customer Reviews

Conservation of the American alligator is one of the twentieth century's environmental success stories. As late as the 1960s, this keystone species, which had often been hunted for its hides and meat, seemed destined to disappear, but preserving habitats, restricting hunting to permit seasons, and raising alligators commercially for the purse and shoe trade has since allowed the predator to thrive across the southeastern U.S. In fact, opportunistic alligators have now become a nuisance in urban areas from Texas to Florida. As biologist Ouchley (who raised pet alligators as a child) points out, humans and alligators often do not mix well. The powerful reptiles usually avoid people; most incidents in which people are injured or killed result from human negligence. Ouchley explains that alligators act according to their instincts, so humans must manage habitats for the safety of all. This compact profile of a unique American animal is very readable and will be a welcome addition to public and school-library collections. --Rick Roche

"From prehistoric relatives to post-endangered status, Ouchley provides a comprehensive review of the alligator, an iconic southern creature."--Michael K. Steinberg, author of "Stalking the Ghost Bird" "The conservation of the American alligator is one of history's best examples of the sustainable-use model for wildlife conservation. The effort to preserve the alligator has contributed to the conservation of wetlands and many other wetland-dependent species throughout its range. Ouchley does an outstanding job of explaining the mysteries of this keystone species."--Robert Barham, Secretary of Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries "Kelby Ouchley is part of a generation of wildlife professionals that helped bring the American alligator back from the brink of extinction. He

provides fascinating insights into its fight for survival."--Jim Kurth, Chief of National Wildlife Refuge System, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

This is an informative and interesting book that I wish was a bit longer as I finished it in a day. It is filled with information about alligators from prehistoric times to present and should be of interest to anyone interested in alligators or their life history. I am an alligator lover and read just about anything that comes out related to them. I have removed one star because the references to support the information given throughout the book are presented in a mess that the author calls a "bibliographic essay." There are sentences throughout the book that reference research studies and presumed facts about alligators but it is just about impossible to tell where the author got their information from to read further or to know whether it is fact or the author's personal opinion. It would be much more helpful if the author had ended sentences about research studies with a citation number that you could look back in a reference section and see where that information came from. Also, many of the references given in the bibliographic essay section are websites and will not be there to search years down the line when the website updates or closes.

Not only is this book full of interesting and up-to-date information about alligators, but it also includes lots of personal stories and exciting experiences of the author. Kelby Ouchley, a retired national wildlife refuge manager and biologist, gives all his scientific writings a personal touch, and his writing is superb. The book is organized so that a person can dip into various topics of interest or read it straight through like a novel. I recommend the second method so you won't miss anything!

I found this book to be most interesting in that it gave me background information I did not have. The next time I see an Alligator I won't be looking at a stranger!!.

Great penmanship by a knowledgeable expert with first hand experience. More illustrations would have scored it a five. Satisfying purchase.

not much new info

I found this book to be a readable foray into the world of alligators. The author clearly has a long history with this impressive predator. My favorite parts included his commentary on the authenticity of past size claims and his description of the economics of alligator farming. I was left wanting more

about the ecology and current status of alligators. For instance, on a recent trip to the swamps of Louisiana, I heard resentment that alligators could not be hunted in some areas with the implication that there was overpopulation. Although the book certainly addressed population numbers, I wanted it to more fully treat the population and capacity dynamics.

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