

Alligators are considered “keystone species”, a species that helps to fashion its environment and influence the types of species that live there. Alligators perform necessary services like providing fresh water for other wildlife to drink during droughts by digging “gator holes” that bring groundwater to the surface. They help to control the numbers of many of the species they eat, which in turn can influence all of the species that each of their prey feeds on. If a keystone species becomes extinct, the entire ecosystem changes, and many species that have come to depend upon the keystone species may also face extinction.

Alligators are protected by both state and federal law, but still need our help. You can help us protect our alligators by avoiding close interaction with them. Don't harass an alligator or swim in water (or let your pets swim in water) known to be alligator habitat. And above all, **NEVER** feed an alligator. Alligators fed by humans come to expect food with each human encounter, and if they don't get it, may act aggressively. Since alligators are experts at finding their way home when relocated, any alligators deemed to be aggressive by the state are shot rather than relocated. To learn more about alligators and our other native reptiles, go to: <http://www.uga.edu/srelherp>.