



Reptiles

Alligators

The American alligator is one of the most spectacular animals in the southeastern United States. Once a federally endangered species, alligators have recovered in South Carolina. They are present in all Spring Island ponds.

The basic body of the alligator has not changed since the time of the dinosaurs. Males on Spring Island grow to 10-11' (250-350 lb) and females grow to 7-8' (100-150 lb). In the wild, alligators live more than 40 years.

Alligators move among the Spring Island ponds and into the surrounding salt marshes, creeks and rivers. The range of adult males is around 2,000 acres, roughly a third of the size of Spring Island, if you include the marsh.

Hatchlings and young alligators eat small fish, amphibians, insects, snails and crustaceans. Large ones feed on fish, turtles, snakes, birds and mammals. Alligators are often seen in the marsh or in saltwater ponds because blue crabs and mullet are among their favorite foods. Alligators are ectothermic (cold-blooded) and their feeding activity is dependent on body temperature.

Alligators are typically inactive during the winter months and are rarely seen except on warm winter days when they may come out to bask in the sun. Alligators seek refuge in dens, often constructed under pond banks.

During their courtship and mating season (April and May), males often bellow to attract females and warn off competing males. In June and July females lay 20-60 eggs in a nest constructed from leaf litter, vegetation and mud. Hatchlings emerge from the eggs in two months. Females protect their babies from predators such as wading birds, turtles, large fish and people. Hatchlings stay together in a pod for up to three years.

Children should never be allowed to fish without supervision. Pets should be kept away from pond edges and out of ponds altogether.

Snakes

Snakes can be found in almost every habitat and are an important part of the biodiversity of Spring Island. They are valuable members of the food chain, serving as both predators and prey. They can also serve as indicators of habitat quality. Most of our species on Spring Island are nonvenomous and are harmless to people and pets. Killing snakes is strongly discouraged.

Snakes help to keep the mice population in balance and will likely move on when the prey population is diminished. To minimize the risk of being startled or bitten by a snake, be cautious when gardening or moving firewood from stacked piles. Keep pathways around your house clean so you can see cryptically colored snakes. Wear shoes when walking outside.

For your safety, we encourage all residents to learn to identify the different snakes on Spring Island. The Nature Center keeps live specimens of the snakes that are common on the Island and in the region.

The copperhead is a venomous species commonly found on Spring Island. A bite requires prompt medical attention! Copperheads have reddish hourglass shaped bands along the back and, as their name implies, copper-colored heads. A rattle or button on the end of the tail is an easy way to distinguish our two rattlesnake species from other snakes. The canebrake rattlesnake is not as common as the copperhead but can still be found in many Spring Island habitats. There are several color variations, but all individuals have wavy cross-bands along the back. Most individuals have a reddish-brown stripe down the spine.

The diamondback rattlesnake is the most dangerous snake in the Southeast but it is extremely rare on Spring Island. It is a heavy-bodied snake with a distinct diamond shape pattern along the back.

Snake bites are very unusual and typically occur when people are walking in leafy areas wearing sandals, picking up wood without first looking under it or intentionally harassing snakes. In the highly unlikely event that you are bitten by a venomous snake, call 911 or have someone drive you to the hospital. Do not try to catch or kill the snake. Do not attempt to apply a tourniquet, make incisions or suck the poison out of the wound. These actions likely will make your condition worse. If a venomous snake bites your dog, call your vet. Most dogs survive snakebites with proper medical treatment.

