

Critters of Florida



**Pocket Guide to
Animals in Your State**

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produced in cooperation with Wildlife Forever

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How to Use This Guide

This book is your introduction to some of the wonderful critters found in Florida; it includes 22 mammals, 29 birds, and 16 reptiles and amphibians. It includes some animals you probably already know, such as deer and bald eagles, but others you may not know about, such as eastern indigo snakes or anhingás. I've selected the species in this book because they are widespread (northern cardinal, page 82), abundant (white-tailed deer, page 54), or well-known, but best observed from a safe distance (American alligator, page 110).

The book is organized by types of animals: mammals, birds, and reptiles and amphibians. Within each section, the animals are in alphabetical order. If you'd like to look for a critter quickly, turn to the checklist (page 140), which you can also use to keep track of how many animals you've seen! For each species, you'll see a photo of the animal, along with neat facts and information on the animal's habitat, diet, its predators, how it raises its young, and more.

Safety Note

Nature can be unpredictable, so don't go outdoors alone, and always tell an adult when you're going outside. All wild animals should be treated with respect. If you see one—big or small—don't get close to it or attempt to touch or feed it. Instead, keep your distance and enjoy spotting it. If you can, snap some pictures with a camera or make a quick drawing using a sketchbook. If the animal is getting too close, is acting strangely, or seems sick or injured, tell an adult right away, as it might have rabies, a disease that can affect mammals. The good news is there's a rabies vaccine, so it's important to visit a doctor right away if you get bit or scratched by a wild animal.

Notes About Icons

Each species page includes basic information about an animal, from what it eats to how it survives the winter. The book also includes information that's neat to know; in the mammals section, each page includes a simple track illustration of the animal, with approximate track size included. And along the bottom, there is an example track pattern for the mammal, with the exception for those that primarily glide or fly (flying squirrels and bats).

On the left-hand page for each mammal, a rough-size illustration is included that shows how big the animal is when compared to a basketball.



Also on the left-hand page, there are icons that tell you when each animal is most active: nocturnal (at night), diurnal (during the day), or crepuscular (at dawn/dusk), so you know when to look. If an animal has a “zzz” icon, it hibernates during the winter. Some animals hibernate every winter, and their internal processes (breathing and heartbeat) slow down almost entirely. Other animals only partially hibernate, but this still helps them save energy and survive through the coldest part of the year.



nocturnal
(active at night)



diurnal
(active during day)



crepuscular
(most active at
dawn and dusk)



hibernates/deep sleeper
(dormant during winter)



Did you know?

Beavers are rodents! Yes, these flat-tailed mammals are rodents, like rats and squirrels. In fact, they are the largest native rodents in North America. Just like other rodents, beavers have large incisors, which they use to chew through trees to build dams and dens. Beavers are the original wetland engineers. By damming rivers and streams, beavers create ponds and wetlands.

Size Comparison



Most Active



Track Size





American Beaver

Castor canadensis

Size: Body is 25–30 inches long; tail is 9–13 inches long; weighs 30–70 pounds

Habitat: Wooded wetland areas near ponds, streams, and lakes

Range: Beavers can be found throughout northern Florida and the Panhandle, as well as much of the rest of the US.

Food: Leaves, twigs, and stems; they also feed on fruits and aquatic plant roots. Throughout the year they gather and store tree cuttings, which they eat in winter.

Den: A beaver's home is called a lodge. It consists of a pile of branches that is splattered with mud and vegetation. Lodges are constructed on the banks of lakes and streams and have exits and entrances that are underwater.

Young: Young beavers (kits) are born in late April through May and June in litters of 3–4. After two years they are considered mature and will be forced out of the den.

Predators: Bobcats, cougars, bears, wolves, and coyotes. Human trappers are major predators too.

Tracks: A beaver's front foot looks a lot like your hand; it has five fingers. The hind (back) foot is long, with five separate toes that have webbing or extra skin between them.

Beavers range from dark brown to reddish brown. They have a stocky body with hind legs that are longer than the front legs. The beaver's body is covered in dense fur, but its tail is naked and has special blood vessels that help it cool or warm its body.





Did you know?

The raccoon is great at catching fish and other aquatic animals, such as mussels and crawfish. They are also excellent swimmers but they apparently avoid swimming because the water makes their fur heavy. Raccoons can turn their feet 180 degrees; this helps them when climbing, especially when going head-first down trees.

Size Comparison



Most Active



Track Size



Hibernates





Northern Raccoon

Procyon lotor

Size: 24–40 inches long; weighs 15–28 pounds

Habitat: Woody areas, grasslands, suburban and urban areas, wetlands, and marshes

Range: They are found throughout Florida and the US; they are also found in Mexico and southern Canada.

Food: Eggs, insects, garbage, garden plants, berries, nuts, fish, carrion, small mammals, and aquatic invertebrates like crawfish and mussels

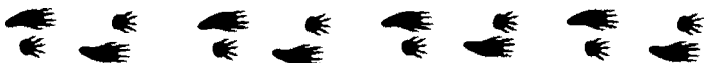
Den: Raccoon dens are built in hollow trees, abandoned burrows, caves, and human-made structures.

Young: 2–6 young (kits) are born around March through July. They are born weighing 2 ounces, are around 4 inches long, and are blind with lightly colored fur.

Predators: Coyotes, foxes, bobcats, humans, and even large birds of prey

Tracks: Their front tracks resemble human handprints. The back tracks sort of look like human footprints.

The northern raccoon has dense fur with variations of brown, black, and white streaks. It has black, mask-like markings on its face and a black-and-gray/brownish ringed tail. During the fall, it will grow a thick layer of fat to aid in staying warm through the winter.





Did you know?

When viewed straight-on, the yellow portion on the mallard's bill resembles a cartoon dog's head. Most domesticated ducks share the mallard as their ancestor. mallard feathers are waterproof; they use oil from the preen gland beneath their feathers to help aid in repelling water. Mallards are the most common duck in the United States and Florida.

Nest Type



Migrates





Mallard

Anas platyrhynchos

Size: 24 inches long; wingspan of 36 inches; weighs 2½–3 pounds

Habitat: Lakes, ponds, rivers, and marshes

Range: They are found throughout Florida; the population stretches across the United States and Canada into Mexico and as far up as central Alaska.

Food: Insects, worms, snails, aquatic vegetation, sedge seeds, grasses, snails, and wild rice

Nesting: April to August

Nest: The nest is constructed on the ground, usually near a body of water.

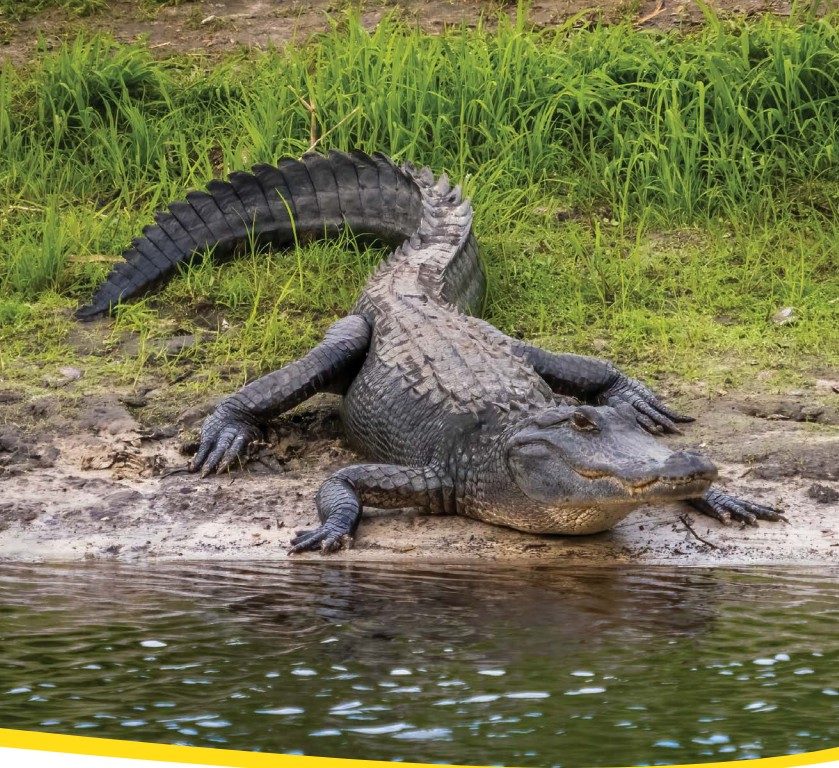
Eggs: 9–13 eggs

Young: Eggs hatch 26–28 days after being laid. The ducklings are fully feathered and have the ability to swim at the time of hatching. Ducklings are cared for until they're 2–3 months old and reach reproductive maturity at 1 year old.

Predators: Humans, crows, mink, coyotes, raccoons, and snapping turtles

Migration: After breeding season, a lot of the population will migrate south; others will stay in familiar areas that have adequate food and shelter.

Male mallards are gray with an iridescent green head with a tinge of purple spotting, a white line along the collar, rusty-brown chest, yellow bill, and orange legs and feet. Females are dull brown with a yellow bill, a bluish area near the tail, and orange feet.



Did you know?

The male alligator does not have vocal cords. The growling or roaring sound that males make in order to attract females comes from the alligator filling its lungs with air and exhaling. Alligators sometimes trick birds into landing or flying close to them by placing sticks and vegetation on their head; birds looking for nesting material will fly and try to retrieve the sticks and be met by the gator's mouth.

Most Active





American Alligator

Alligator mississippiensis

Size: 8–16 feet long; weighs up to 1,000 pounds

Habitat: Freshwater ponds, coastal areas, rivers, swamps, and brackish water (mix of fresh and saltwater)

Range: They are native to the southeastern United States from Florida to North Carolina and as far west as Texas. In Florida, they can be found statewide.

Food: Opportunistic carnivores that feed on snakes, fish, birds, mammals, insects, and sometimes even fruit

Mating: Starts in spring and goes until May or early June. Mating takes place at night. Males have multiple mates.

Nest: Nests are made of plant material and can be 3 feet tall by 7 feet wide. Eggs are covered with vegetation.

Eggs: 35–50 white eggs

Young: Eggs hatch about 2 months after laying. Hatchling sex is temperature dependent; nest temperatures below 88 degrees or above 90½ degrees are usually female, and temperatures of 89½ to around 90½ degrees are usually male. They reach independence at 1 year and reproductive age at around 10 years. Hatchlings form pods or groups and alert others to nearby danger by making clicking noises.

Predators: Humans; as juveniles: birds, snakes, bobcats, raccoons, otters, large fish, and older alligators

The American alligator is a thick-bodied reptile with short legs. It has a wide U-shaped snout. The body has thick skin that comes in colors of black to brownish gray; the tail is thick and muscular; the underside is white. Hatchlings are striped for the first several months. If the water freezes, alligators will bury themselves in mud and stick their snouts out for several days.

Get to Know the Wild Side of Florida!



Learn about 67 of Florida's most important birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians. The *Critters of Florida* wildlife pocket guide is informative, concise, and easy to use. Each species is showcased with a professional-quality photograph that's paired with neat-to-know details like habitat, range, and a "Did You Know?" set of facts.

Book Features

- 67 critters—only Florida animals
- Full-color photographs of every species
- Concise descriptions and interesting facts
- Attractive layout with kid appeal

About the Author

Alex Troutman is a fish and wildlife biologist and an environmental educator. He is the co-organizer for several Black in X weeks, and he takes part in movements that encourage diversity in nature and STEAM fields, the celebration of Black individual scientists, and increasing awareness of Black nature enthusiasts.

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