

The Alligator's Allure: Changing Perceptions of a Charismatic Carnivore

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Introduction

The American alligator (known to scientists as Alligator mississippiensis) is a large, toothy reptile that can grow to as long as 16 feet or more. Although it inhabits the freshwater swamps, marshes, rivers, and lakes throughout much of the southeastern United States, the species is most abundant in the states of Florida and Louisiana.¹ As a member of the order Crocodylia, the alligator belongs to a 230 million-year-old lineage that survived the Cretaceous mass extinction, when 85 percent of the earth's species perished. As a semi-aquatic creature, the alligator moves freely between water and land. And as a large, top-level carnivore, the species not only projects a menacing presence but also occasionally consumes humans and their pets. Given these many boundary crossings—chronological, geographical, and gastronomic—Americans have long struggled to get a precise handle on this charismatic reptile, and they have thought about it in various (sometimes contradictory) ways: as a fearsome predator, a symbol of its landscape, a marketable commodity, an endangered species, and a nuisance.²

This chapter explores Euroamericans' responses to the American alligator, a species that serves as a “repository of meaning,” to borrow historian Richard White's evocative phrase.³ It seeks to unpack the tangled layers of perception associated with this multivalent vestige of the prehistoric era. What such an examination reveals is not only a longstanding fear of the alligator but also a yearning to tame or domesticate the beast. Euroamericans have long sought to manipulate and control the natural world, to impose order on nature while bringing it under human dominion. In the case of the alligator, that urge to master nature initially came in the desire to destroy the fearsome creature. Beginning in the nineteenth century, a longing to domesticate the alligator—in the sense

of making it more docile or adapting it to live in an increasingly human-dominated environment—largely supplanted the urge to destroy it. As Florida’s human population continues to rapidly expand, the species has been confined to smaller and smaller wetland plots, and individual alligators transgressing the artificial boundaries erected to confine it face swift and sure destruction. As a result, I would argue that the American alligator has become a kind of semi-domesticated reptile subjected to intense human surveillance, manipulation, and intervention.⁴

Yet, the species has not remained a totally passive victim in this process of domestication; rather, it has continually resisted efforts to confine it to human-sanctioned habitat, just as it has confounded efforts to encompass it within simplistic views about its biology and behavior. For several decades now environmental historians have been arguing that the discipline of history needs to take nature more seriously, that historians need to move beyond the unreasonably parochial view that the natural world is simply a backdrop against which human actors have played out their own uniquely compelling drama. Nature has agency, too, advocates of environmental history have insisted, and scholars ought to pay much more attention both to its profound role in shaping our thoughts and lives and in the equally profound ways we have transformed the earth.⁵ As a species that ranges widely across the Florida landscape and occasionally attacks people and pets, the alligator offers a vivid reminder that nature remains a potent force, despite our ongoing efforts to bring it fully under our thumb.

The story of the American alligator also reminds us how difficult it is to draw a sharp line between nature and culture, between the so-called real world that exists independent of humanity and the ideas and activities of people.⁶ The ancient reptile is a

tangible physical presence on the landscape, the progeny of a prehistoric lineage that thrived for hundreds of millions of years before humans first walked the earth. Yet, humans have also clearly transformed the alligator since Amerindians began migrating across Beringia at the end of the last Ice Age. For example, although the reptile lacks natural predators once it reaches adulthood, it becomes noticeably skittish once humans begin hunting it. Nor has it escaped the barrage of synthetic chemicals that modern industrial society has rained down upon the earth. A 1980 pesticide spill in Lake Apopka, the fourth largest freshwater body of water in Florida, for example, continued to cause reproductive failure in the lake's alligator population more than a decade later.⁷ And across the state, alligators suffer symptoms of endocrine system damage, even at sites with no known chemical spills or point-source contaminants.⁸

The alligator also shows how drawing a sharp distinction between nature and culture proves difficult on a more conceptual level. Our deep-seated views about the ancient reptile's allegedly aggressive temperament continue to color our perceptions of and interactions with the species, even though naturalists have been arguing for years that it is not a particularly menacing creature. Clearly when we peer into the eyes of an alligator, what we see reflected back is as much a product of our own preconceptions and fears as the unvarnished reality of the creature that stands before us. The complex, contradictory perceptions of the American alligator, its continued resistance to efforts to control it, and its ability to shed light on the blurry boundary between nature and culture not only make the charismatic species "good to think with" but also worthy of scholarly attention.⁹

The Alligator as Ferocious Predator

Europeans who ventured to the New World beginning in the fifteenth century feared and loathed the predators they encountered there. For nearly three decades now, scholars have been documenting how large carnivores came not only to be reviled but also systematically destroyed in America.¹⁰ Part of that reaction stemmed from the potential threat these predators posed to settlers themselves and the actual threat they posed to their livestock; but much of it was also more primal, a response that the nature writer Barry Lopez has dubbed “theriophobia” or “[f]ear of the beast as an irrational, violent, insatiable killer.”¹¹ Until recently, Westerners have tended to perceive large predators as evil and crusades to exterminate them as part of a divinely ordained mission to carry the torch of civilization to a dark, forbidding American wilderness.¹² In the process of implementing that mandate, Europeans and their descendants have engaged in unthinkable cruel behavior toward predatory species, particularly the gray wolf, which they have tortured and killed with abandon.

While systematic predator control programs failed to specifically target alligators, European settlers also viewed this giant, water-loving reptile as an evil, threatening presence. That response was strongly influenced by pre-existing views of the Nile crocodile, a beast not only notorious for attacking humans but also a source of inspiration for the Leviathan, the hideous, demonic monster depicted in the Old Testament.¹³ The first-century naturalist Pliny the Elder damned the crocodile as “a curse on four legs, and equally pernicious on land.”¹⁴ Medieval bestiaries featured images of the reptile consuming humans, while characterizing it as “fearefull, ravening, malitious, and treacherous.”¹⁵ Given all this cultural baggage, it is hardly surprising that when

Christopher Columbus's son, Don Ferdinand, landed on the coast of the island now known as Haiti in 1497, he reported seeing "vast, great crocodiles" that were "so ravenous and cruel that if they find a man sleeping, they drag him to the water to devour him."¹⁶ Seventy years later, when the French artist Jacques Le Moyne encountered an alligator during his explorations in Florida, he depicted it as a giant, marauding beast attacking a native village.¹⁷

Two centuries later, the Philadelphia naturalist William Bartram continued this longstanding tradition of vilification. Bartram's widely read book, Travels through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida (1791), not only offered a vivid account of his nearly five-year journey through the wilds of the southeastern United States but also proved an important source of inspiration for a later generation of romantic writers.¹⁸ As a Quaker with pantheistic leanings, Bartram celebrated the beauty and utility of southern flora and fauna, which he saw as evidence of God's active presence in the world. But he made an exception for the alligator, which he considered a regional name for the Nile crocodile. The report of alligators attacking his canoe along the St. Johns River, in north Florida, remains one of the most famous and memorable passages from his book:

Behold his rushing forth from flags and reeds. His enormous body swells. His plaited tail brandished high, floats upon the lake. The waters like a cataract descend from his opening jaws. Clouds of smoke issue from his dilated nostrils. The earth trembles with his thunder. . . . I was attacked from all sides, several endeavoring to upset the canoe. . . two very large ones attacked me closely . . .roaring terribly and belching floods of water over me.¹⁹

According to Bartram, it was only through judicious application of a wooden club that he managed to extricate himself from the jaws of these dangerous reptiles.

Whether they accepted or refuted Bartram's account, it long remained the touchstone for those attempting to understand the American alligator and its behavior. As early as the 1840s, the South Carolina herpetologist John Edwards Holbrook challenged Bartram's assertion about the ferocity of the alligator, but Holbrook's protests seem to have largely fallen on deaf ears.²⁰ More influential on perceptions of the beast (because it was more consistent with deeply held views of crocodilian nature) was the British novelist Frances M. Trollope's 1832 report of a American settler who awakened one night to find "the relics of three of his children scattered over the floor, and an enormous crocodile, with several young ones around her, occupied in devouring the remnants of their horrid meal." After fleeing for help, the hapless husband returned to find that "the reptile had eaten his wife and two more children."²¹

Challenging pervasive myths about alligator behavior has not been easy, in part because naturalists were relatively slow to take up systematic study of the species. The first scientific monograph treating the reptile, Albert Moore Reese's The Alligator and Its Allies, did not appear until 1915.²² Based on his experience, Reese argued that it was not a particularly aggressive species. While it would defend itself when cornered, like most other wild animals, he also believed "it will always flee from man if possible, and the writer has frequently waded and swam in ponds and lakes where alligators lived without the least fear of attack." Reese did admit that this might not have been possible in the days when alligators were "more numerous and had not been intimidated by man and his weapons."

Two decades later, the wealthy Louisiana entrepreneur, sportsman, conservationist, and amateur naturalist Edward A. McIlhenny published the first monograph on the alligator's life history.²³ He based his book largely on first-hand observations made during more than five decades in the area surrounding his family's 6000-acre estate on Avery Island, the site of prime alligator habitat. He and his boyhood playmates felt so little fear of the species that they even made a game of pelting large alligators with mud.²⁴ While acknowledging that the reptile could kill livestock, even an animal as large as a full-grown cow, McIlhenny denied that it would attack humans unless provoked by hunters or trappers trying to capture them.

Forty years later the wildlife biologist Kent Vliet offered a more striking refutation of the widely held view that the American alligator is a particularly aggressive species with a taste for human flesh. Vliet believed that to understand alligator behavior, he needed to get as close to his research subjects as possible, to position himself at their level to discern subtle visual cues that might remain undetected from afar. In a memorable National Geographic television special, Realm of the Alligator, which first aired in 1986, he demonstrated his study technique by floating up to his neck in a small lake brimming with large captive alligators.²⁵ Armed with only a five-foot stick, he approached within a few feet of several gators, which rather than attacking, seemed relatively indifferent to his presence. Vliet's demonstration led the nature writer Diane Ackerman to question her own assumptions about alligator aggressiveness, but it seems to have had little effect on assuaging public fears the possibility of alligator attack.²⁶

To be sure, alligators do assault humans, but only rarely. Since the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission began keeping statistics on the subject in 1948,

alligators have attacked 351 individuals, and 16 deaths have been attributed to this cause.²⁷ That's an average of just over six attacks per year and a death every three or four years in a state that is now crowded with nearly 18 million human residents and an estimated 1-2 million alligators. Yet, because those incidents invariably receive extensive, lurid media coverage, they skew public perceptions not only about the risk of alligator attack but also the aggressiveness of the species. The periodic release of horror movies featuring terrifying man-eating alligators (or even crocodiles, since most people are unable to distinguish between the two) further reinforces the image that the species is a fearsome beast with a penchant for human flesh.²⁸

The Alligator as Symbol of the Florida Landscape

Layered onto and related to the perception of the alligator as a fierce, man-eating predator is the view of the species as a symbol of the landscape it inhabits. By the 1570s, European artists had crafted a set of icons to represent newly discovered America.²⁹ For example, the symbol for America in Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* (1603), the manual baroque artists relied on for guidance on how to present abstract ideas, featured a native woman "almost naked," with a feathered head ornament, a bow, and a human arrow-pierced head (suggesting cannibalism) and crudely drawn crocodilian at her feet. "The Lizard[s], they are so big here," Ripa noted in the accompanying text, "that they devour Men."³⁰ Well into the eighteenth century the cartouches on maps of British America (e.g., Henry Popple's 1733 map, published in Amsterdam in 1737) and East Florida (e.g., Bernard Romans's 1774 map, published in New York in 1781) continued to prominently feature alligators or other crocodilians as symbols of the American landscape.³¹ So did a

variety of paintings, engravings, porcelain figurines, and sculptures produced until the middle of the nineteenth century. In many of these depictions a female Native American rides on the back of a crocodilian, an image hinting at domestication of the species that would later loom large in late nineteenth- and early twentieth- century souvenir photographs and postcards.³²

While alligators and other crocodilians became prominent symbols of the New World, few Americans had the opportunity to view live alligators in their native haunts until the second half of the nineteenth century. Before the Civil War, when the tourist industry in the United States was primarily regional in scope and limited in size, only a small number of naturalists, sportsmen, and health-seeking invalids made the trek to sparsely populated Florida.³³ Although steamboats began regularly traveling from Savannah, Georgia, to Jacksonville, Florida, in 1845, a relative lack of infrastructure to support large-scale tourism kept visitation to a minimum. After the war, new hotels sprouted up in Jacksonville (the gateway city to the state until the early twentieth century) and other popular tourist destinations, while new steamship and railroad lines eased inland transportation. At the same time, northern newspapers and magazines extolled Florida as a “sunny, exotic, and healthful destination,” while newly issued guidebooks beckoned would-be visitors with enticing descriptions of attractions along with helpful advice about traveling through the region.³⁴ As a result, a growing number of middle- and upper-class Americans flocked to the state, especially during the winter months.

Excursions on river steamers provided one of the most popular pastimes for Florida tourists during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.³⁵ Steamboats first began plying the St. Johns River in the 1830s, carrying goods and passengers from

Jacksonville and penetrating more than 200 miles southward into what author Harriet Beecher Stowe called the “mysteries and wonders” of the Florida wilderness.³⁶ Starting in the 1860s, seasonal visitors could also travel down the Ocklawaha River, which empties into the St. Johns River about 100 miles south of Jacksonville. Specially designed steamboats navigated the narrow, meandering river during the twenty-four-hour journey from Palatka to Silver Springs, a trip that featured picturesque scenes of towering palm trees, moss-draped cypresses, and an abundance of exotic wildlife.³⁷

As the travel writer Kirk Monroe noted in 1883, the “star and leading attraction” of these river excursions were the alligators that swam in the waters and lined the banks.³⁸ The earliest passengers typically responded to sightings of the prominent reptile as they did with other wildlife: with a barrage of gunfire. The naturalist Edward Howe Forbush, who traveled down the St. Johns River in 1876, protested the needless carnage inflicted by heavily armed passengers who “shot ad libidum at alligators, waterfowl, or anything that made an attractive target.”³⁹ Fearful that indiscriminate shooting was decimating alligator and other wildlife populations along the rivers—the very attractions their customers found so fascinating—steamboat owners banned the practice by the 1880s.

While the construction of a vast railroad network and the introduction of the automobile gradually spelled the doom of Florida steamboat excursions, they failed to dampen tourists’ enthusiasm for alligators. In 1893, the entrepreneur Edward Whitney began exhibiting live specimens of the reptiles in conjunction with his souvenir shop and natural history museum, located at the end of a three-mile tramline that ran from downtown St. Augustine.⁴⁰ Curiosity and souvenir shop owners had longed displayed an alligator or two to lure customers to their doors.⁴¹ But Whitney and his partners began

exhibiting large numbers of the beasts as part of an attraction dubbed an “alligator farm.” The name suggests not only that alligators were domesticated but also that they were bred at the attraction, though virtually all of the captive alligators were taken from the wild.

Competing businesses soon sprung up across the state.⁴² To keep the public coming back, alligator farm owners developed a variety of shows featuring the charismatic saurian. The most popular and enduring of these was an act dubbed “alligator wrestling” in which a trainer ran through various maneuvers with a large specimen, tricks like turning the reptile on its back and rubbing its stomach to “hypnotize” it, pulling its jaws apart while sitting on its back, and pinning the reptile’s jaws between his chin and chest.⁴³ Some particularly intrepid wrestlers performed at least part of their routine under water, much to the delight of audiences. The practice began in the 1920s, when the nurseryman Henry Coppinger, Jr., introduced the basic moves at Miami’s Muse Isle Seminole Indian Village, but it soon became standard at virtually all alligator farms.⁴⁴ Its continuing popularity was based on the widely shared perception that the alligator was a fierce, aggressive beast; the symbolic domination of the species the activity suggested; and the very real possibility of injury when handlers became careless.

The idea of the alligator as symbol of the Florida landscape received further elaboration when the University of Florida adopted the reptile as its mascot.⁴⁵ In 1907, just two years after the state legislature established the institution of higher education at Gainesville, a local drug and stationary store owner named Phillip Miller placed an order for pennants and banners to sell at his establishment. When the manufacturer inquired about the school’s mascot, Miller replied that it had none. His son then recommended the

alligator, a species long associated with the state. Unveiled in the fall of 1908, the new mascot quickly caught on with students, administrators, and the general public.

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, then, the alligator had cemented its reputation as a pre-eminent symbol of the Florida landscape. Indeed, the British author Iza D. Hardy titled the account of her travels in the south Florida Oranges and Alligators (1886), linking the reptile to that other pervasive icon of the Sunshine State.⁴⁶ So did the Alligator Brand citrus crate label from the 1920s and 1930s, which featured a fanciful, human-like alligator, standing upright on two legs and carrying a tray of oranges, a pose reminiscent of the comical stuffed alligators peddled at tourist shops at the time and often included in souvenir portraits taken in photography studios.⁴⁷ Here the fearsome alligator has been entirely domesticated, remade into a docile creature intent on serving human ends.⁴⁸

The Alligator as Commodity

The third conceptual filter through which Americans tended to view the alligator, and indeed much of the American landscape, was as a potential or actual commodity.⁴⁹ A key factor luring Euroamericans to the New World was the superabundance of natural resources found there. Settlers sought to turn a profit from this seemingly limitless natural bounty—to extract marketable plants, animals, and minerals from the landscape and incorporate them into a vast commercial web that stretched across the Atlantic and beyond. This process of commodifying nature began slowly at first, but picked up steam with the development of ever more swift and reliable transportation networks—rivers,

canals, roads, and especially railroads—that linked the continent together, thereby increasing the potential scope, scale, and speed of commercial exchange.

While the alligator was commodified only on a limited scale until the second half of the nineteenth century, like most other wildlife it was regularly utilized both by the Native Americans and Euroamericans who lived within its geographical range.⁵⁰ The Natchez Indians, for example, reportedly fashioned alligator skins into ceremonial drums played by scratching with sticks. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Euroamericans experimented with extracting oil from the reptile's fat, which they used to render indigo dye, grease machinery, and formulate liniment. Alligator musk-glands, like those of other crocodylians, were sometimes employed in the manufacture of perfume. Settlers also used carved alligator teeth as chargers to store gunpowder. And Native Americans and settlers alike consumed alligator meat, although the latter varied greatly in their opinions about the reptile's palatability.

In the early nineteenth century, tanners began fashioning alligator hides into leather for boots, shoes, and saddles.⁵¹ But the resulting leather was not only expensive but also quite porous, and hence not sufficiently waterproof for most applications. The blockade of the South during the American Civil War fostered increased demand for alligator leather in southern states, but interest diminished with the cessation of hostilities. Beginning around 1869, however, growing markets for luxury goods of all sorts and the development of better tanning techniques led to a strong demand for alligator hide. Manufacturers crafted alligator leather, tanned hide taken from the underside of the animal, into a wide variety of expensive goods, including shoes, belts, purses, wallets, travel cases, card cases, and others. The striking reticulated pattern of the

reptile's leather was one characteristic that made it so desirable, but so was the fact that it came from an allegedly fierce beast.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the alligator trade had become significant enough for the U. S. Department of Commerce to begin tracking its economic dimensions. According to a federal report from 1893, Florida represented the center of that trade, with as many as 2.5 million hides having been shipped out of the state since 1880.⁵² The price hunters received varied from about 50 cents for a four-foot hide to about \$1.50 for a seven-foot hide. Jacksonville was the leading city in the trade, and two firms that purchased hides from hunters and other dealers (mostly in the less settled, southern part of the state) handled about 60,000 skins in 1889 and about 20,000 in 1890.

Excessive harvest levels continued well into the twentieth century. In 1929, Florida dealers alone reported handling 190,000 alligator hides, which were fetching an average of about \$1.50 each.⁵³ By 1939, the price had increased to \$5.25 per hide, while the overall harvest had declined to about half its 1929 level. A year later the going rate for hides was \$7.00 each, and about 75,000 of them were brought to market. The sharp increase in the price of alligator hides coupled with the gradual decrease in the total number obtained suggests continued strong demand for alligator products accompanied by a decline of their populations.

In addition to luxury leather goods, alligators were also fashioned into saurian souvenirs for the tourist trade. Craftsmen polished and carved alligator teeth, shaping them into whistles and a variety of jewelry, such as brooches and bracelets.⁵⁴ Taxidermists stuffed alligators, sometimes placing them in comical human-like poses. And store owners offered live baby alligators for tourists to take home with them, thus

leading to the pervasive urban myth about the species inhabiting the sewers of New York after being flushed down the toilet.⁵⁵ In 1890 alone, visitors to Jacksonville purchased over 8,000 live alligators and 450 pounds of alligator teeth, while 40 people in that town gained employment stuffing alligators and polishing teeth.⁵⁶

Souvenir and curio shops also boasted a bewildering variety of goods depicting the alligator, ranging from carved walking canes and smoking pipes to silver spoons, knives, and enameled jewelry.⁵⁷ The Jacksonville firm of J. Osky, founded in 1884, was one of the most enduring curio dealers to feature not only a variety of products made from the popular species but also “Monster Live Alligators on Free Exhibition.”⁵⁸ By 1893, the city of Jacksonville boasted 12 dealers in alligators and 18 curio dealers whose inventories featured products made from or depicting the species. Most of these establishments were located on Bay Street, near the wharf where steamers docked, a bustling thoroughfare that one guidebook thought might be more appropriately called “Alligator Street.”⁵⁹

Alligator farms represented another form of commodification of the species. By 1930, with the increase in tourist traffic associated with adoption of the automobile, at least a dozen of these popular roadside attractions had sprouted across the state. The largest of them, in South Jacksonville, contained 12,000 alligators, while its main competitor in St. Augustine boasted more than 6,000 of the popular reptiles.⁶⁰ Most alligator farms also stocked a variety of alligator-related products—picture postcards, miniature alligators made of various materials, stuffed alligators, tanned hides, and an assortment of finished leather goods, ranging from small novelty articles to more expensive handbags and suitcases. In the 1940s, the American naturalist Thomas

Barbour noted with tongue in cheek that Florida roadside attractions held enough alligators to “repopulate the state if there were money available to buy them up and turn them loose.”⁶¹

The Alligator as Endangered Species: The Early Years

Increasing commodification of the alligator, which led to a drastic decline in its population, gradually fostered concern about the future of the species. That concern evolved through several phases, beginning with a handful of scattered statements lamenting the local loss of the species that began appearing in the nineteenth century. By the first half of the twentieth century, those calls of alarm increased in number and urgency, leading officials in Florida and Louisiana to institute first local and then statewide protection. Continued destruction of the alligator’s habitat, extensive poaching, and the rise of the modern environmental movement finally led the federal government to intervene on behalf of the species in the late 1960s, when it experienced a remarkable recovery.

Local and state officials established various laws regulating the hunting of North American game species from the colonial period on. But systematic protection of wildlife failed to begin in earnest until the mid-nineteenth century, when a growing community of sportsmen pushed for state laws that established closed seasons for game species, created fish and game commissions, and mandated hunting licenses.⁶² Near the end of the nineteenth century, a second phase of wildlife conservation began when a broad coalition of naturalists, humanitarians, and nature lovers joined in the Audubon movement, which focused on non-game wildlife.⁶³ Participants in the movement

organized Audubon societies, lobbied for state legislation to protect non-game species (especially birds), and established educational campaigns to garner widespread support for wildlife. Sport hunters and Audubon society members, who found a common enemy in large-scale commercial hunting, managed to close down the market for numerous rapidly diminishing species by the beginning of the twentieth century. Yet, the alligator failed to gain support in the campaign that rescued the American bison, several plume birds, and other species from the jaws of extinction.

That is not to say that the decline of the species went unnoticed. As early as 1814, the lawyer and author H. M. Brackenridge noted that overhunting of the alligator had led to its decline in Louisiana.⁶⁴ Later on in the century, Kirk Monroe ended his 1892 account of a Florida alligator hunt with the warning that brisk demand for alligator leather would continue until “the last of these uncouth monsters, together with all the buffalo in the west and the fur seal of the North, shall have disappeared from the face of the earth.”⁶⁵ In 1908, the Wall Street-banker-turned-adventurer A. W. Dimock lamented the “The Passing of the Florida Alligator,” and called for conservationists to devote more attention to the species: “It is up to us who claim to be nature-lovers to look after the Florida alligator. . . . We are working, almost without hope, for birds that are nearly extinct and animals which have been banished from their environments by the requirements of civilization, but we are neglecting a creature whose existence is imperiled, although his habitat is secure, his sustenance is not threatened, and he needs only to be let alone to restore life and attractiveness to the waterways of a great national playground.”⁶⁶

Naturalists also weighed in on the issue. Albert Reese was equivocal about the future of the species; he refused to speculate about whether “wholesale destruction by sportsman and native hunter will eventually exterminate our giant reptile,” but thought it likely that a few alligators would survive as long as regions like the Everglades and the Okefinokee remained inaccessible. Two decades later E. A. McIlhenny lamented the obvious decline of the species while arguing that the “actual extermination of these harmless and picturesque reptiles is not an immediate danger.”⁶⁷ E. Ross Allen, herpetologist and owner of a popular roadside attraction named the Florida Reptile Institute, was more pessimistic, and beginning in 1935 began a long crusade to gain local and state protection for the species.⁶⁸

Facing increasing pressure to respond to the decline in the number of alligator hides being brought to market despite strong market demand, officials in Florida and Louisiana took tentative steps toward protecting the alligator.⁶⁹ As early as 1926, Louisiana passed a bill prohibiting alligator hunting for much of the year, but the new law exempted the fourteen coastal parishes with the best habitat for the species. During this same period, several Florida counties instituted closed seasons on the alligator. Not until 1943, however, following a sharp decline in the number of hides delivered to dealers, did the state of Florida provide protection for the increasingly beleaguered species. The new law prohibited hunting the alligator during its breeding season and young less than four feet long at all times during the year.⁷⁰ Yet, the alligator population continued to decline.

From Endangered Species to Nuisance

The second half of the twentieth century saw an increase in the threats to the American alligator as well as an accompanying increase in efforts to rescue it from the threat of extinction. The introduction of air conditioning and the initiation of large-scale mosquito spraying programs after World II ushered in a period of dramatic growth in Florida.⁷¹ Between 1940 and 1970, the state's population more than tripled, from 1.9 million to 7 million residents, leading to unprecedented demand for land.⁷² Prime alligator habitat was lost not only to development for housing tracts, roads, and strip malls but also to boost agricultural production. In addition, the alligator faced renewed pressure from hunters responding to a growing postwar demand for alligator leather.

Accompanying (and to some degree countering) these demographic and economic transformations was the emergence of the postwar environmental movement.⁷³ Heightened levels of affluence, better access to higher education, the popularization of basic ecological concepts, and increased leisure-context interaction with the natural world fostered growing fears about the environmental costs associated with unbridled development. As a potent symbol of wilderness under threat, the alligator gained support from environmentalists who feared for the future of the species and who began aggressively lobbying on its behalf. Naturalists, nature-lovers, game officials, and wildlife conservationists joined forces to secure more stringent regulations in Florida (which closed the hunting season on alligators in 1961), Louisiana (which did the same in 1963), and other states with remnant populations of the species.⁷⁴ These laws did nothing to slow the rate of habitat destruction, however, particularly in Florida, and they failed to stop alligator poaching, which continued despite closed seasons on the reptile.

Growing concern about the fate of the alligator and other vanishing wildlife species finally led to action at the federal level.⁷⁵ The initial step came in 1964, when the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service established a Committee on Rare and Endangered Species, composed of nine agency biologists and wildlife managers. By August of that year the committee issued a preliminary copy of its “Redbook”—the first official federal list of native endangered wildlife.⁷⁶ The American alligator was included among the sixty-three vertebrate species highlighted as facing extinction. Two years later, Congress passed the first Endangered Species Act, which authorized up to five million dollars annually to purchase protective refuges for native species. While the alligator was among the seventy-eight species declared endangered under the terms of the new law, the bill failed to address the ongoing problem of illegal poaching anywhere other than at federal refuges.⁷⁷ And it did nothing to stop commercial trade in illegally obtained alligator hides.

Frustrated at the failure to rescue the beleaguered species, the Ph.D.-trained herpetologist Archie Carr entered the fray.⁷⁸ In 1967 he published an article in National Geographic entitled “Alligators: Dragons in Distress.”⁷⁹ In lyrical prose, Carr told of his first encounter with the voice of alligator in a cypress swamp not far from the St. Johns River in Florida. There on a clear spring night, he experienced three alligators bellowing in a “ponderous, pulsing chorus, half sound, half shaking of the earth” that “seemed to rock the whole swamp.” Now, several decades later, the same site was hushed, with the gators vanished and the cypresses having long since been transformed into lumber: “The roar of the alligator, rolling out of the mist of April marshes, is one of the great animal sounds of the world. It is a song 200 million years old, an echo of the Age of Reptiles,

when cold-blooded creatures ruled the earth. But now the incredible voice is falling silent, and the needless loss will not sit well with our descendents.”⁸⁰ To save the reptile, Carr called for a change in fashion to eliminate demand for alligator products and an extension of the Lacey Act—a federal law passed in 1900 that forbid taking illegally caught birds and mammals across state lines—to include alligators.

In 1968, Carr joined with several fellow gator enthusiasts—including amateur and professional naturalists, state legislators, game officials, Audubon Society members, and others—to create a loose-knit organization dedicated to “restoring the alligator to a balanced population as an observable part of the natural environment.”⁸¹ Over the next four years, the newly created American Alligator Council hosted a series of research symposia on the species, successfully lobbied for local and state laws outlawing the sale of alligator products, and initiated an educational program to elicit support for the reptile’s conservation. Responding to pressure from this and a host of other environmental organizations, in 1969 Congress passed a broadened Endangered Species Act. Prominent among the provisions of the new legislation was an expansion of the Lacey Act along the lines Carr had advocated two years earlier.⁸² Because it was now illegal to engage in interstate commerce in unlawfully taken reptiles, poachers experienced much greater difficulty bringing gator hides to market.

Then something remarkable happened that surprised almost everyone: the alligator population quickly rebounded. We have no firm figures on the overall population at the time of the passage of the Endangered Species Act of 1969 or its much more restrictive revision in 1973, but anecdotal evidence suggests a rapid, dramatic recovery of the species across much of its historic range.⁸³ Confident that the species was

no longer in danger, as early as 1972, the Louisiana Fish and Game Commission began a limited experimental hunt of the alligator. By 1975, the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission was responding to about 5,000 complaints per year involving “nuisance” alligators that had ventured too close to humans, and it was relocating about 2,000 of them.⁸⁴ The commission complained that the relocation program was a failure, though, because Florida’s waters were already fully stocked with gators and when transplanted they had a knack for finding their way back to their original home. Moreover, the agency argued that it lacked the resources to deal with the growing problem. Commission leaders pushed for a program that allowed contracted private agents to “harvest” nuisance alligators, with the sale of hides used to compensate the hunters and recoup administrative costs.⁸⁵ They were barred from doing so, however, as long as the federal government listed the alligator as “endangered” and the sale of alligator products remained barred by law in many states and localities.

The proposal to routinely kill rather than relocate nuisance alligators and to reopen the then illegal trade in alligator products sparked a contentious debate among wildlife enthusiasts. Preservationist-oriented naturalists like Archie Carr, Wayne King (curator of reptiles at the American Museum of Natural History in New York), and others strongly opposed the idea of re-commodifying the giant reptile they had struggled to remove from the market. They worried about the negative effect not only on the American alligator, but also the other twenty-two crocodylian species that were subjected to international trade. Many of these species were also threatened or endangered, and distinguishing between them proved difficult, especially once their hides had been processed. The issue provoked a split in the American Alligator Council between

preservationists who argued that resuming legal trade in the alligator was a mistake and utilitarian conservationists who argued that selective harvesting and sale of the species was essential to its continued survival.⁸⁶

In the end, the pressure to renew trade in alligators proved too strong to resist. Responding to estimates showing robust populations across much of its historic range and pressure from state game officials, in 1975 the Fish and Wildlife Service down-listed from “endangered” to “threatened” the alligator populations of several Louisiana parishes.⁸⁷ Two years later, the federal agency down-listed the alligator throughout much of the rest of its range as well, thus allowing the possibility of controlled hunting and renewed commercial trade in the species.⁸⁸ In 1978, the state of Florida began a control program using private contractors financed through the sale of alligator hides, and beginning in 1980, alligator meat. Many in the first corps of state-contracted alligator “trappers” had previously been poachers.⁸⁹

Conclusion

The alligator remains a complex, compelling creature. Today tourists entering Florida on Interstate 95, one of the main arteries entering the state, soon encounter a billboard featuring a massive, menacing portrait of the reptile. An advertisement for a tourist shop and information center that exhibits a 13-foot alligator, the billboard serves as a vivid reminder of several ways Americans have come to view the species: as a fearsome beast, symbol of the landscape, and valuable commodity. So do similar billboards not far down the road that beckon tourists to the St. Augustine Alligator Farm, which remains a popular attraction more than a century after it first opened its gates in

1893. Alligator wrestling, which began more than eighty years ago, continues to enthrall visitors at that and similar establishments across the state. Clearly this strange, fearsome relic from the prehistoric age continues to fascinate tourists.

Florida residents also offer a limited welcome to alligators.⁹⁰ They seem to relish the idea that this ancient, charismatic icon—the remnant of a rapidly vanishing wild Florida and once endangered species—continues to thrive in one of the fastest growing states in the nation. But the welcome quickly wears thin when alligators venture into residential areas, as they do with increasingly regularity. When this happens, the offending reptile is generally subject to immediate harvest by licensed private trappers, who sell its skin and meat in a highly regulated market. Aware that their actions might anger or offend those Florida residents who value the species as a tangible reminder of the state’s wild heritage, the trappers usually capture so-called nuisance alligators alive and kill them only after transporting them far from public view. More than 5,000 mature alligators per year face destruction through Florida’s nuisance alligator program. The vast majority of them are guilty of nothing more than growing more than four feet long, moving through areas where they might come into contact with humans, and acting “aggressive” (which in most instances means simply refusing to immediately flee in the presence of humans or their pets). Thus, paradoxically, the species that now serves as a poster child trumpeting the success of the Endangered Species Act continues to exist only through intense human management.⁹¹ For centuries westerners have dreamed of taming this frightening beast; now they have gone a long way toward achieving that goal.

Endnotes

¹ The other species of alligator is the Chinese alligator (*Alligator sinensis*), a much smaller, critically endangered reptile that inhabits freshwater wetlands around the lower Yangtze River in China.

² On the cultural history of the American alligator, see Wilfred T. Neill, *The Last of the Ruling Reptiles: Alligators, Crocodiles, and Their Kin* (New York, 1971); Vaughn L. Glasgow, *A Social History of the American Alligator: The Earth Trembles with His Thunder* (New York, 1991); and Jay Mechling, "The Alligator," in *American Wildlife in Symbol and Story*, ed. Angus K. Gillespie and Jay Mechling (Knoxville, Tenn., 1987), 73-98. Other important studies include Kevin M. McCarthy, ed., *Alligator Tales* (Sarasota, Fla., 1998); Martha A. Strawn, *Alligators: Prehistoric Presence in the American Landscape* (Baltimore, Md., 1997); C. C. Lockwood, *The Alligator Book* (Baton Rouge, La., 2002); and Sherman A. Minton, Jr., and Madge Rugherford Minton, *Giant Reptiles* (New York, 1973).

³ Richard White, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River* (New York, 1995), 90. White was referring specifically to salmon that inhabit the Columbia River, but his point applies equally well to many forms of wildlife.

⁴ My thinking about the alligator as semi-domesticated has been influenced by Andrew Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison: An Environmental History, 1750-1920* (Cambridge, 2000), 165; see also, Christopher R. Eck, "Beasts and Savages: Taming the 'Wilds' of Florida in the Popular Imagination for Five Centuries," *South Florida History* 29, no. 3 (2001): 12-19.

⁵ A recent example of this call is found in Ted Steinberg, "Down to Earth: Nature, Agency, and History," *American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (2002): 798-820, and his book, *Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History* (New York, 2002).

⁶ Mart Stewart, "Environmental History: Profile of a Developing Field," *History Teacher* 31 (May 1998): 350-368," highlights how exploring the nature/culture relationship has formed a central theme in the field. Over the last decade or so, numerous scholars have stressed the deep conceptual difficulties involved in differentiating between nature and culture. See, for example, Michael Pollan, *Second Nature: A Gardener's Education* (New York, 1991); and William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature* (New York, 1995).

⁷ The episode is summarized in Theo Colburn, Dianne Dumanoski, and John Peterson Myers, Our Stolen Future (New York, 1997), 151-53.

⁸ Louis J. Gillette, Jr., et al., “Alligators and Endocrine Disrupting Contaminants: A Current Perspective,” American Zoologist 40 (2000): 438-52.

⁹ The suggestive phrase is from Claude Lévi-Strauss, Totemism (Boston, 1963), 89; see also the recent anthology, Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman, eds., Thinking with Animals: New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism (New York, 2005).

¹⁰ The literature on American attitudes and policies related to predators, especially the wolf, is vast and growing. See, for example, Thomas Dunlap, Saving America’s Wildlife (Princeton, N.J., 1988); Barry H. Lopez, Of Wolves and Men (New York, 1978); and Jon T. Coleman, Vicious: Wolves and Men in America (New Haven, Conn., 2004). Timothy Rawson, Changing Tracks: Predators and Politics in Mt. McKinley National Park (Fairbanks, Alaska, 2001), counts no less than 30 non-fiction adult books on wolves between 1978 and 2001. On attitudes toward predators more broadly, see David Quammen, Monster of God: The Man-Eating Predator in the Jungle of History and the Mind (New York, 2003).

¹¹ Lopez, Of Wolves and Men, 190.

¹² See, for example, Roderick Nash, Wilderness and the American Mind, 3rd ed. (New Haven, Conn., 1982).

¹³ Alistair Graham and Peter Beard, Eyelids of Morning: The Mingled Destinies of Crocodiles and Men (Greenwich, Conn., 1973); and C. A. W. Guggisberg, Crocodiles: Their Natural History, Folklore, and Conservation (Newton Abbott, 1972), 19-21.

¹⁴ Pliny the Elder, Natural History, Book 8, 37-38, quoted in the wonderful website, “The Medieval Bestiary,” <http://bestiary.ca/beasts/beast146.htm>, accessed on 21 April 2005.

¹⁵ Quoted in Neill, Last of the Ruling Reptiles, 362.

¹⁶ Quoted in Minton and Minton, Giant Reptiles, 21.

¹⁷ A convenient source of Le Moyne’s image is “Exploring Florida: A Social Studies Resource for Students and Teachers,” produced by the Florida Center for Instructional Technology, University of South Florida, <http://fcit.usf.edu/florida/photos/native/lemoyne/lemoyne.htm>, accessed 21 April 2005.

¹⁸ William Bartram, Travels through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida, the Cherokee Country, the Extensive Territory of the Muscogugles, or Creek Confederacy, and the Country of the Choctaws (Philadelphia, 1791). See also the heavily annotated “Naturalists Edition” of this book, edited by Francis Harper (New Haven, Conn., 1958), which is the version I used.

¹⁹ William Bartram, Travels, 75-76.

²⁰ John Edwards Holbrook, North American Herpetology, reprint ed. (Athens, Ohio, 1976 [1842]). Holbrook’s account of the American alligator is also reproduced in David Taylor, ed., South Carolina Naturalists: An Anthology, 1700-1860 (Columbia, S.C., 1998), 126-133.

²¹ Quoted in Neill, Last of the Ruling Reptiles, 28.

²² Biographical information on Reese may be found in Allen G. Debus, World Who’s Who in Science: A Biographical Dictionary of Notable Scientists from Antiquity to the Present (Chicago, 1968), 1404; Albert M. Reese, The Alligator and Its Allies (New York, 1915), <http://www.herper.com/ebooks/titles/Alligator.html>.

²³ Edward A. McIlhenny, The Alligator’s Life History (Boston, 1935). For a biographical sketch of McIlhenny, see George H. Lowery, Jr., “Edward Avery McIlhenny,” The Auk (January 1951): 135.

²⁴ McIlhenny, The Alligator’s Life History, 7.

²⁵ John Paling, producer, Realm of the Alligator, (Stamford, Conn., 1986).

²⁶ Diane Ackerman, “A Reporter at Large: Crocodilians,” New Yorker 64 (10 October 1988), 42-46, 51-58, 63-81.

²⁷ See the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission “Alligator Attacks Fact Sheet,” available at <http://wildflorida.org/gators/Default.htm>. See also the list maintained at: <http://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/fish/Sharks/attacks/relariskgator.htm>.

²⁸ See, for example, Alligator, released in 1980, which traces the exploits of a giant, ravenous alligator on the loose in Chicago’s sewers. “The Internet Movie Database (IMDb),” <http://www.imdb.com>, contains more than a dozen motion pictures whose plots summaries included fearsome alligators.

²⁹ On this an other New World iconography, see Hugh Honour, The New Golden Land: European Images of America from the Discoveries to the Present Time (New York, 1975), 84-117.

³⁰ The quote is from the 1709 edition, available at <http://www.kb.nl/dutchess/20/21/info-7361.html>.

³¹ Both images are available at the Library of Congress “American Memory” website, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html>.

³² See, for example, Honour, The New Golden Land, 110 and 112.

³³ On the development of tourism in America, see Dona Brown, Inventing New England: Regional Tourism in the Nineteenth Century (Washington, D.C., 1995); John Jackle, The Tourist: Travel in Twentieth-Century America (Lincoln, Nebr., 1985); and Marguerite S. Shaffer, See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940 (Washington, D.C., 2001).

The definitive history of Florida tourism has yet to be written, but some places to start include: Ken Breslauer, Roadside Paradise: The Golden Age of Florida’s Tourist Attractions, 1929-1971 (St. Petersburg, Fla., 2000); Tim Hollis, Dixie before Disney: 100 Years of Roadside Fun (Jackson, Miss., 1999); Elliott J. Mackle, “The Eden of the South: Florida’s Image in American Travel Literature and Painting, 1865-1900” (Ph.D. dissertation, Emory University, 1977); Larry Roberts, Florida’s Golden Age of Souvenirs, 1890-1930 (Gainesville, Fla., 2001); and Floyd and Marion Rinhart, Victorian Florida (Atlanta, Ga., 1986).

³⁴ Roberts, Florida’s Golden Age, 5.

³⁵ On steamboat travel on the St. Johns River, see Edward A. Mueller, Steamboating on the St. Johns, 1830-1885 (Melbourne, Fla., 1980); on the Ocklawaha River, see Edward A. Mueller, Ocklawaha River Steamboats (Jacksonville, Fla., 1983); C. Bradford Mitchell, Paddle-Wheel Inboard: Some History of the Ocklawaha River Steamboating and of the Hart Line (Providence, R.I., 1983 [1947]); and Steven Noll, “Steamboats, Cypress, and Tourism: An Ecological History of the Ocklawaha Valley in the Late Nineteenth Century,” Florida Historical Quarterly 83 (Summer 2004): 6-23.

³⁶ Harriet Beecher Stowe, Palmetto Leaves (1873), facsimile ed. (Gainesville, Fla., 1968), 247.

³⁷ On the history of Silver Springs, see Richard A. Martin, Eternal Spring: Man’s 10,000 Years of History at Florida’s Silver Springs (St. Petersburg, Fla., 1966).

³⁸ Kirk Monroe, “A Trip over Crooked Water,” Harper’s Weekly 27 (1883), reproduced in Mueller, Ocklawaha River Steamboats, 23-26.

³⁹ Quoted in Paul Brooks, Speaking for Nature: How Literary Naturalists from Henry Thoreau to Rachel Carson Shaped America (Boston, 1980), 153.

⁴⁰ William R. Adams and Carl Shiver, St. Augustine Alligator Farm: A Centennial History (St. Augustine, Fla., 1993).

⁴¹ Kirk Monroe, "Catching Alligators," Harper's Weekly ?? (12 April 1884): 233-234.

⁴² Dick Bothwell, The Great Outdoors Book of Alligators (St. Petersburg, Fla., 1962) lists numerous alligator-related attractions that were still around by the 1960s. According to Bothwell (p. 65), the first example was actually the Florida Alligator Farm that began in 1891. Additional information on alligator farms may be found in Breslaur, Roadside Paradise, and the "Florida Lost Tourist Attractions" website, <http://www.lostparks.com>. There were also alligator farms in Los Angeles, Calif. (f. 1907) (see the website "The California Alligator Farm," <http://www.lincolnheightsla.com/alligator>) and Hot Springs, Ark. (f. 1894).

⁴³ Bothwell, Great Outdoors Book of Alligators, 10-14.

⁴⁴ Patsy West, The Enduring Seminoles: From Alligator Wrestling to Ecotourism (Gainesville, Fla., 1998).

⁴⁵ Samuel Proctor and Wright Langley, Gator History: A Pictorial History of the University of Florida (Gainesville, Fla., 1986), 78-79.

⁴⁶ Iza Duffus Hardy, Oranges and Alligators: Sketches of South Florida Life (London, 1887).

⁴⁷ The label was used by the Caloosahatchee Valley Growers, of Alva, Fla.

⁴⁸ The Floridian Brand orange crate label from the 1940s also featured an alligator crawling over the edge of an oversized orange.

⁴⁹ On the commodification of nature in America, see William Cronon, Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England (New York, 1983); and especially, Ted Steinberg, Down to Earth.

⁵⁰ On the early uses of the alligator, see Glasgow, A Social History of the American Alligator, 57-61; and John James Audubon, "Observations on the Natural History of the Alligator," Edinburgh New Philosophical Journal 2 (March 1827): 270-280.

⁵¹ The development of the alligator leather industry is detailed in Glasgow, A Social History of the American Alligator, 63-64; Andrews Wilkinson, "The Alligator Hunters of Louisiana," The Century 43 (1893): 399-407; and "Leather," The American Cyclopaedia (1873-1876): 276-277.

⁵² Hugh Smith, "Report on the Fisheries of the South Atlantic States," Bulletin of the United States Fish Commission for 1891 11 (1893): 343-345. On the south Florida alligator trade during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Harry A. Kersey, Jr., Pelts, Plumes, and Hides: White Traders among the Seminole Indians, 1870-1930 (Gainesville, Fla., 1975); and Glen Simmons and Laura Ogden, Gladesmen: Gator Hunters, Moonshiners, and Skiffers (Gainesville, Fla., 1998). For additional figures on the alligator trade, see C. H. Stevenson, "Utilization of the Skins of Aquatic Animals," United States Commission on Fish and Fisheries Report for 1902 (1904): 281-352; and Remington Kellogg, The Habits and Economic Importance of Alligators, United States Department of Agriculture, Technical Bulletin no. 146 (Washington, D.C., 1929).

⁵³ The figures that follow are from E. Ross Allen and Wilfred T. Neill, "Increasing Abundance of the Alligator in the Eastern Portion of Its Range," Herpetologia 5, no. 6 (December 1949): 109-112.

⁵⁴ Examples are found in Roberts, Florida's Golden Age, 173-174.

⁵⁵ Jan H Brunvand, The Vanishing Hitchhiker: American Urban Legends and Their Meanings (New York, 1981), 90-98; Loren Coleman, "Alligators-in-the-Sewers: A Journalistic Origin," Journal of American Folklore 92 (1979): 335-338; and "The Sewergator Sanctuary," <http://www.sewergator.com>.

⁵⁶ Hugh Smith, "Report on the Fisheries," 345.

⁵⁷ Roberts, Florida's Golden Age, contains hundreds of examples.

⁵⁸ It remained in business until 1955. For an early Oskey's ad, see George Shaw, Jacksonville Illustrated (Jacksonville, Fla., 1898). See also Roberts, Florida's Golden Age, 103.

⁵⁹ Roberts, Florida's Golden Age, 101.

⁶⁰ These figures are from Kellogg, Habits and Economic Importance, 19-21.

⁶¹ Thomas Barbour, That Vanishing Eden: A Naturalist's Florida (Boston, 1944), 193.

⁶² On sportsmen and the early legislation to protect game species, see George Reiger, American Sportsmen and the Origins of Conservation, 3rd ed. (Corvallis, Ore., 2000); Daniel J. Herman, Hunting and the

American Imagination (Washington, D.C., 2001); and James A. Tober, Who Owns the Wildlife?: The Political Economy of Conservation in Nineteenth-Century America (Westport, Conn., 1981).

⁶³ On the history of the Audubon movement, see Frank Graham, Jr., The Audubon Ark: A History of the National Audubon Society (New York, 1990); Robin W. Doughty, Feather Fashions and Bird Preservation: A Study in Nature Protection (Berkeley, Calif., 1975); and Mark V. Barrow, Jr., A Passion for Birds: American Ornithology after Audubon (Princeton, N.J., 1998).

⁶⁴ Glasgow, Social History of the American Alligator, 64.

⁶⁵ Reproduced in McCarthy, Alligator Tales, 67.

⁶⁶ Reproduced in McCarthy, Alligator Tales, 106.

⁶⁷ McIlhenny, Alligator's Life History, 121.

⁶⁸ Allen and Neill, "Increasing Abundance," 109-110; and C. J. Hylander, Adventures with Reptiles: The Story of Ross Allen (New York, 1951).

⁶⁹ Glasgow, Social History of the American Alligator, 123-131.

⁷⁰ Allen and Neill, "Increasing Abundance," 110.

⁷¹ Mark Derr, Some Kind of Paradise: A Chronicle of Man and the Land in Florida (New York, 1989); Jack E. Davis and Raymond Aresnault, eds., Paradise Lost? The Environmental History of Florida (Gainesville, Fla., 2005); Raymond Aresnault, "The End of the Long Hot Summer: The Air Conditioner and Southern Culture," Journal of Southern History 50 (1984): 597-628; and Gordon Patterson, The Mosquito Wars: A History of Mosquito Control in Florida (Gainesville, Fla., 2004).

⁷² Derr, Some Kind of Paradise, 337.

⁷³ Samuel P. Hays, Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955-1985 (Cambridge, 1987); and Hal K. Rothman, The Greening of a Nation? Environmentalism in the United States since 1945 (Fort Worth, Tex., 1998).

⁷⁴ Glasgow, Social History of the American Alligator, 131-132.

⁷⁵ Steven Lewis Chaffee, Prohibitive Policy: Implementing the Federal Endangered Species Act (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), 32-57; and Shannon Petersen, Acting for Endangered Species: The Statutory Ark (Lawrence, Kans.: University of Kansas Press, 2002), 21-35.

⁷⁶ Committee on Rare and Endangered Wildlife Species, Rare and Endangered Fish and Wildlife Species (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Sports Fishery and Wildlife, 1964).

⁷⁷ See, “78 Species Listed Near Extinction,” New York Times (12 March 1967), 46.

⁷⁸ On Carr, his research, and his wildlife conservation work, see Frederick Rowe Davis, “Archie Carr and the Survival of Natural History in Twentieth-Century America: The Early Years (1930-1960),” (Master’s thesis, University of Florida, 1996).

⁷⁹ Archie Carr, “Alligators: Dragons in Distress,” National Geographic 131, no. 1 (January 1967): 133-148.

⁸⁰ Carr, “Alligators,” 133-134.

⁸¹ The activities of the American Alligator Council during its early years are chronicled in The Archie Carr Papers, Smathers Library, University of Florida, Gainesville, Fla. The quote is from an undated letter in that collection, William M. Partington to Florida Audubon Society Alligator Committee Members, Box 34, Folder 3. See also, Huey B. Long, F. Wayne King, and Edward R. Ricciuti, eds., Proceedings of the American Alligator Council, a copy of which is also located in the Archie Carr Papers.

⁸² Yaffee, Prohibited Policy, 42, reports that the provision of the Endangered Species Conservation Act of 1969 extending the Lacey Act to reptiles, amphibians, and some invertebrates was almost entirely in response to illegal traffic in alligator hides.

⁸³ Some wildlife biologists argue that, in fact, the alligator was never truly in danger of becoming extinct. See, for example, Thomas A. Lewis, “Searching for Truth in Alligator Country,” National Wildlife (Oct./Nov. 1987): 14-18; and Thomas C. Hines, “The Past and Future Status of the Alligator in Florida,” Proceedings of the Annual Conference of Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies 33 (1979): 224-232.

⁸⁴ Allan R. Woodward and Barry L. Cook, “Nuisance-Alligator (Alligator mississippiensis) Control in Florida, U.S.A.,” Crocodiles: Proceedings of the 15th Working Meeting of the Crocodile Specialist Group, IUCN—World Conservation Union, Gland, Switzerland (2000): 446-455.

⁸⁵ See, for example, Tommy C. Hines and Allan R. Woodward, “Nuisance Alligator Control in Florida,” Wildlife Society Bulletin 8, no. 3 (1980): 234-241.

⁸⁶ See, for example, Archie Carr to William Partington, 4 November 1971, Archie Carr Papers, Box #34; John Dillin, “Gators Recover, and Florida May Reopen Hunting,” Christian Science Monitor, 31 January 1974, 5B; and F. Wayne King, “The American Alligator,” National Parks and Conservation Magazine 46, no. 5 (May 1972): 15-18.

⁸⁷ Glasgow, Social History of the American Alligator, 139.

⁸⁸ The various changes in the alligator’s status are recorded in Fish and Wildlife Service, Proposal to Reclassify the American Alligator,” Federal Register 40, no. 131 (8 July 1975), 28712-28714; Fish and Wildlife Service, “Reclassification of the American Alligator to Threatened Due to Similarity of Appearance throughout the Remained of Its Range,” Federal Register 52, no. 107 (4 June 1987): 21059-21064.

⁸⁹ Initially the state agency took possession of the hides and conducted an auction to sell them, but beginning in 1988 ownership of the skins and meat was transferred to the trappers immediately upon taking the alligator. That same year the state began a lottery system granting private citizens the right to hunt alligators on public property. The changes in the program are chronicled in Woodward and Cook, “Nuisance-Alligator Control in Florida,” 449-450.

⁹⁰ See, Tommy Hines and Richard Scheaffer, “Public Opinion about Alligators in Florida,” Proceedings of the Annual Conference, Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies 31 (1977): 84-89.

⁹¹ See, for example, the brochure U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, American Alligator: Alligator mississippiensis (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1995), which is part of its “Endangered Species Success Story” series that the agency has begun to maintain political support for the Endangered Species Act. The American alligator is one of only a handful of North American species that have been declared “recovered” under the terms of that act. See the listing maintained at the agency’s website: <http://www.fws.gov>.