

GATOR WATCH

REPORT AND PHOTOS: BECKY HINSON



DEATH OF A GATOR



Alligators are more active in Florida from April through June. According to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) the females build a mound nest of soil, vegetation or debris and deposit anywhere from 32 to 46 eggs in late June or early July. Incubation is approximately 63-68 days, and hatching occurs from mid-August through early September. About a third of all gator nests are destroyed by predators or flooding.

I spend most of my time outside looking for wildlife to photograph and while I've seen a lot of alligators, I've never seen a nest. We do see many gators passing through our pond on Olympic Drive and recently had to contact a trapper because the largest gator had become aggressive. He was in excess of 6 feet and would follow us around the edge of the lake. He came out of the water, on more than one occasion, approaching people taking his picture. It got to the point where I wasn't comfortable sitting in our yard so we made the decision to have him removed.

The request for removal went through May Management. I called Mary Marchiano at 904-940-1002 and she made arrangements for a trapper to contact me. He called and asked for a photo of the alligator then obtained a permit to remove him. The gator temporarily left our pond but returned a couple of weeks later. I contacted Mike and he made arrangements for one of his



agents to come by. He made a couple of attempts during daylight hours without success. I had hoped to get some up close photos after the gator was trapped, but that didn't happen. The agent decided to trap him after dark and managed to locate him around nine o'clock at night. He texted me letting me know they had successfully removed him. They didn't trap the four foot alligator so, if you fish or visit our pond, please don't approach him. Alligators are naturally afraid of humans but can grow accustomed to us if they are fed. They're opportunistic feeders and once they lose that fear, they become a threat to us.

In June, multiple people watched, in horror, as a 75 year old man was attacked and killed at the Myrtle Beach Golf and Yacht Club in South Carolina. The elderly man drowned during the attack. According to WMBF News, rescue crews were told the victim was standing near the water's edge when the alligator lunged and attacked, dragging him under. The 11-foot alligator was captured and euthanized on site.

An elderly woman died in July after being attacked by two alligators in Englewood Florida. It happened at the Boca Royale Golf and Country Club when the woman fell in the pond near her home. FWC arrived to remove the gators. According to them, in recent years, Florida has experienced tremendous human population growth. Many residents seek waterfront homes and increasingly participate in water related activities. This has resulted in more frequent alligator-human interactions and a greater potential for conflict. There's always a possibility of conflict but serious injuries caused by an alligator are uncommon.

Both deaths occurred in golf club neighborhoods, just like Magnolia Point, and both victims were residents standing in their own yards. While the chances of a serious encounter are low, it is always possible. We would've preferred to leave our large alligator alone but he became an attraction to those looking to get a picture. Remember, you can't get close enough with your cell phone, to get a good photo. If you want a picture to share with friends just let me know. I'm happy to text one to you. I use a zoom lens that can get a clear and detailed picture from a safe distance.

I walk several miles through our neighborhood every day looking to photograph our beautiful wildlife. While my goal is to photograph flowers, alligators, birds, deer and other wildlife, I'm always happy to stop and get a picture of you with your pet for our newsletter. I recently had a resident become very angry, screaming at me, under the mistaken impression I was taking photos of her home. Rest assured, I would never photograph anyone's home or invade your privacy. Any time a photo is taken of anything in a neighbor's yard, it is only done so with their knowledge and permission. I want to thank those neighbors who have invited me into their homes and allowed me to take pictures of their beautiful gardens. I meet so many interesting people and enjoy our conversations. Thank you so much for all of your compliments! I'm glad you enjoy my photos.

That's all for this month's Gator Watch. Please keep your young children and pets away from the edges of our ponds. We don't want to be the next golf club community to make the news due to a needless alligator injury or fatality.

