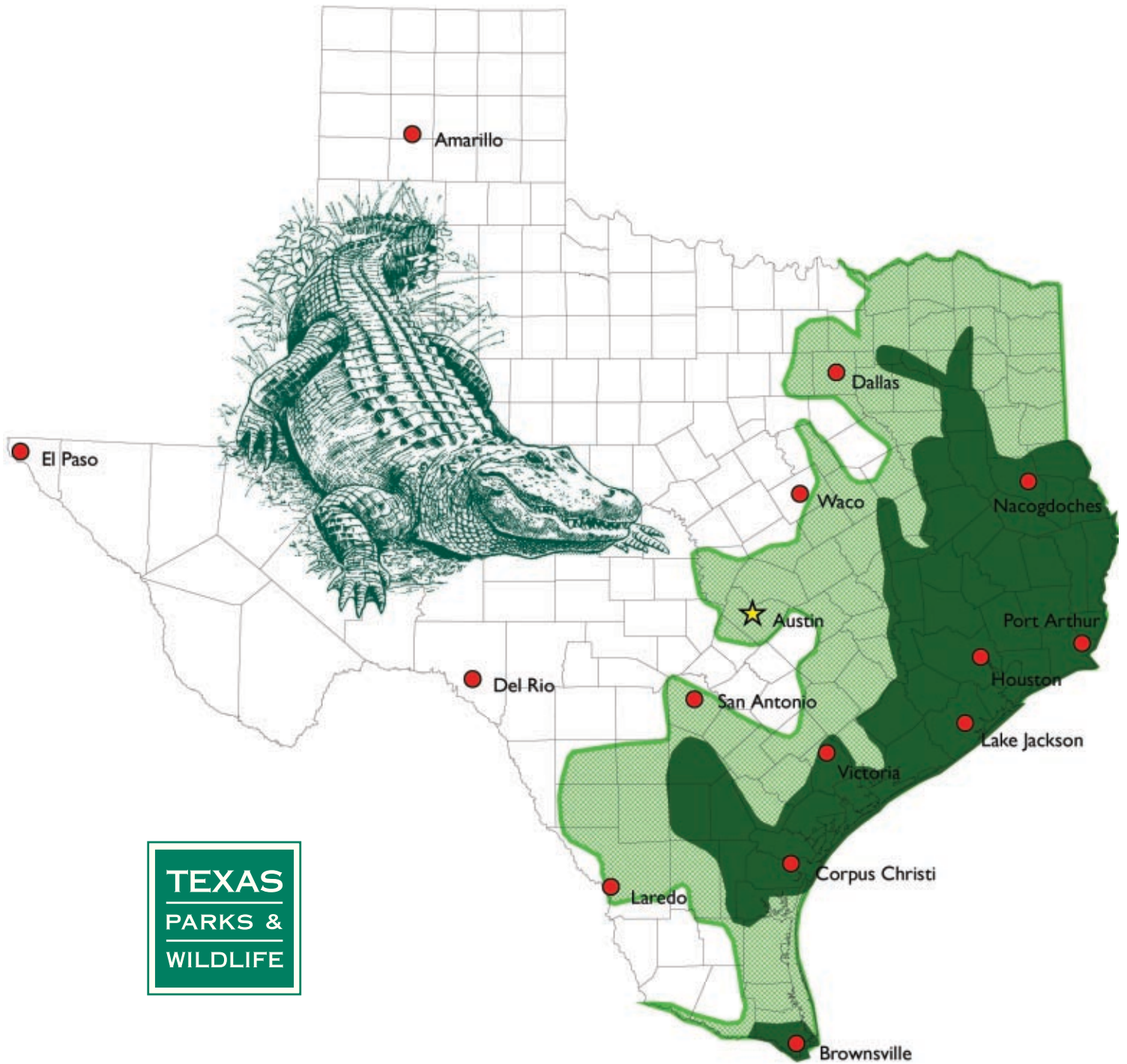


DISTRIBUTION OF AMERICAN ALLIGATORS IN TEXAS



The distribution of American alligators (*Alligator mississippiensis*) in Texas is limited by habitat and temperature requirements to the eastern portion of the state defined by the shaded area on the above map. The greatest density of individuals, represented by the darker green portions of the map, occur in areas with the best wetland habitats, such as coastal marshes, natural lakes, riverine wetlands, and some reservoirs. Throughout the rest of the range, habitat is marginal for American alligators, so individuals are likely to be limited and scattered in these areas of pocket habitat. Some small populations of American alligators may occur outside of the above general range and may represent remnant populations from a former range or from released American alligators. This range map was prepared from statewide responses to a county-by-county questionnaire and American alligator nuisance reports compiled by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department field staff in 2002.

American Alligators in Texas

- Name:** The American alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*) receives its name from a corruption of the Spanish "el lagarto," or lizard. The current spelling dates back to at least 1699.
- Range:** In Texas, the American alligator ranges from the Sabine River of East Texas to the Gulf of Mexico across the coastal marshes to the Rio Grande and west to around Interstate 35. This range includes about 120 counties with the highest concentrations occurring along the Gulf Coastal Plains. The American alligator is the only crocodylian native to Texas.
- Size/Age:** Newly hatched alligators measure 8-9" in length. Males and females grow at similar rates until they reach 3'. Females then grow much slower than males. Male alligators at age 10 can be 8' long, but females at age 10 are usually only 6-7' long. At age 20, males can be up to 11' long, and females can be up to 8' long. Any alligator over 10' long is usually male. Males can reach ages of 35-40 years in the wild. In captivity, they have survived up to 80 years of age. Older males are the exception and not the rule. Females can reach 30-35 years of age in captivity, but few females live that long in the wild. The longest recorded alligator (19' 2" long) was taken in Louisiana in 1890. It could have weighed up to 2,300 lbs. The largest alligator harvested in Texas was in 1998 and measured 14' 4" in length with an estimated weight of 900 lbs. Today, most alligators rarely reach beyond 10' in total length. One this size could weigh 250-300 lbs. Most alligators observed in Texas are typically 5-6' long and weigh 25-50 lbs.
- Food:** American alligators less than 3' in length mainly eat spiders, insects, crawfish, shrimp, minnows, and crabs; however, they will eat other food sources that are small enough for them to swallow whole. As they grow larger, fish, turtles, frogs, snakes, and small birds become an important part of their diet. Alligators greater than 4' long eat a wide variety of food items and are very opportunistic. The diet of an adult alligator is mostly made up of crawfish, crabs, non-game fish, and carrion. Occasionally, game fish, large turtles, wading birds, waterfowl, muskrat, nutria, otters, raccoons, alligators, feral hogs, and white-tailed deer are eaten. Non-food items, such as shotgun hulls, glass bottles, brass objects, and wood are frequently consumed by alligators, so it is important not to litter.
- Nest:** Courtship and mating begins in late spring and continues through early summer. Females usually begin building nests in May and June. The nest mound is usually composed of grasses, cattails, bark, mud, and other vegetation available in the area. The female usually lays 15-60 eggs in the mound and compresses the mound by crawling across it. Clutch size averages 35 eggs, but clutches of 80 have been observed. The eggs hatch about 65 days after being laid, usually in late August and early September. Solar radiation and decaying vegetation provide the heat necessary for incubation of the eggs. Temperature of the eggs during incubation determines the sex of the young produced. A group of hatchling alligators is called a "pod."
- Alligators and People:** With the human population in Texas continuing to expand, increased contact between people and alligators can be expected. Alligators naturally shy away from humans. However, problems do arise when people feed alligators because the alligator loses its fear of humans and begins to associate people with food. This produces a potentially dangerous situation. An alligator that has been frequently hand-fed will often lunge at an outstretched hand. This action is often interpreted as an "alligator attack" when in reality the alligator has been conditioned to respond to an outstretched hand expecting to be fed. For this reason, it is wrong to feed any wild alligator. Although alligators are normally sluggish or lethargic in appearance, they can become quite agile if disturbed or annoyed. People and pets should never approach alligators closely. This is particularly true of nesting females. As with all wild animals, people should treat alligators with respect. Alligator-human conflicts are rare in Texas. No human fatality attributed to alligators has been recorded in Texas. Good judgement on the part of humans can keep incidents at a minimum. Alligators are protected by law. Any potentially dangerous alligator should be reported to TPWD for proper handling. Contact your local warden or call 1-800-792-1112.

For further information, contact the American Alligator Program of Texas Parks & Wildlife Department at 10 Parks and Wildlife Dr., Port Arthur, TX 77640, 409.736.2551, or txgator.info@tpwd.state.tx.us.