

BOOK  **EXPLORERS**

Exploring Your World

Creatures of the Everglades



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Everglades National Park

Everglades National Park, more often called the Everglades, is found in southern Florida. It is a wetland that covers 2,357 square miles. Most of the area is covered in a mixture of salt and freshwater. The water is shallow, so the best way to travel through the Everglades is by airboat. It is popular for visitors to take airboat tours through the swamps to look at wildlife.



History of the Everglades

The Everglades was once home to a Native American tribe called the Seminoles. The Seminoles lived around the trees in the Everglades and ate fish, turtles, and other creatures from the swamp for food. They lived peacefully until new settlements came to the area. Although Seminole people still live there today, these settlements forced them to change their way of life. The Seminoles began to make money from the settlers. Eventually, settlers began to build roads and buildings. Soon, visitors could easily travel to the Everglades to see the amazing animals.



American Alligator

The Everglades is home to the American alligator. The alligator is a reptile, a scaly animal that lays soft eggs on land. Reptiles can spend time in the water, but they need air to breathe. The average-sized alligator weighs 500 to 600 pounds and is 10 to 15 feet long. However, there have been alligators that weigh almost 1,000 pounds! The main difference between alligators and crocodiles is the shape of their snouts. The animals' **snouts** can sometimes look the same, so it can be difficult to tell the reptiles apart.



Alligators are **predators** who mostly eat small animals, like snakes and fish. They like to swallow their prey in one bite. Alligators are afraid of humans and will swim away or sink into the water if a human is around. It is **illegal** to feed alligators because if they get comfortable taking food from people, they may no longer be afraid of humans. This could make an alligator more of a threat.



Florida is home to over 1.3 million alligators. These alligators used to be on the **endangered** species list, but are now protected. Alligators are a protected species because they look like another reptile called a caiman. Caimans are endangered, so it is important that scientists monitor both species.



American Crocodile

American crocodiles are large reptiles. They can grow up to 20 feet and weigh 2,000 pounds. Their nostrils, eyes, and ears are on the top of their heads to allow their bodies to stay underwater. Staying underwater helps the crocodiles with surprise attacks on **prey**.



Crocodiles are predators. They eat prey from the size of an insect to the size of a cow. American crocodiles have no natural predators, so they aren't usually eaten by other animals. Interestingly, some sharks are afraid of crocodiles and will swim away when one is nearby.



Crocodiles are also a protected species, so they can't be hunted or killed. Since crocodiles breathe air just like people, they are sometimes seen on land. Although crocodiles need air to live, they can also stay underwater for up to two hours at a time. It's unusual for crocodiles to attack humans, but they can lunge quickly if they feel **threatened**. It is best to stay away from crocodiles in the wild.



Turtles

Visitors can find many different kinds of turtles in the Everglades. A commonly seen turtle is the Florida box turtle. This turtle is medium-sized and usually weighs around 2 pounds. Box turtles love the wetlands because they eat small creatures, such as fish, that live in the water.



A rarely seen turtle in the Everglades is the loggerhead. A loggerhead turtle is a type of sea turtle. Loggerheads are endangered. This means they must be protected to avoid **extinction**. Scientists carefully watch loggerhead nests to make sure they aren't bothered by humans or predators.



Protecting the Everglades

Everglades National Park uses money from visitors to help protect the creatures of the wetlands. Right now, there are 36 different kinds of endangered species in the Everglades. People work to help these creatures by keeping the wetlands clean and safe.

Glossary:

- endangered (adj):** at risk of disappearing forever (p. 5)
- extinction (n):** the process of a large group disappearing forever (p. 10)
- illegal (adj):** against the law (p. 4)
- predators (n):** an animal that hunts and eats other animals for food (p. 4)
- prey (n):** an animal that is hunted and eaten by another animal (p. 6)
- snouts (n):** noses and mouths of animals (p. 3)
- threatened (v):** putting something in danger (p. 8)

Sources:

A beginning for the park. (2015, April 14). National Park Service.

<https://www.nps.gov/ever/learn/kidsyouth/a-beginning-for-the-park.htm>

Water water everywhere. (2015, April 14). National Park Service.


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The wild life of wildlife. (2020, June 29). National Park Service.


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