

Volume I, Number 2

SMALL-TIME ALLIGATOR MANAGEMENT

A CONDOMINIUM ASSOCIATION located a few miles to the south-southeast of Fort Myers in unincorporated Lee County has developed a new concept to manage American alligators. The Master Association of Eagle Ridge Lakes Condominium has appointed a resident of their community to serve as their Alligator Complaint Evaluator (ACE). Creation of this voluntary position was precipitated after a resident unilaterally called on a Florida-licensed alligator trapper to remove a few small alligators from a pond on the condo's common property. In some communities there are always people who don't appreciate the presence of alligators nor do they understand their ecological value. There are usually other folks in the same complex who enjoy seeing "their" alligators cruising the ponds or hauled out on a grassy bank basking, or even engaged in courtship activities. To satisfy the concerns of both kinds of people the ACE is authorized to receive direct reports of resident generated alligator complaints from within the community, and to conduct ongoing population/size surveys of the condo's mostly transient alligators. In an educational outreach program the ACE also conducts periodic walk-about nighttime alligator counts and lectures, along with Q and A. This is a social event for community residents so they may learn why alligators are important and what threats they could present for residents and their pets. If a complaint from a resident about a person's or an alligator's misbehavior is reported to the ACE, the incident is fully investigated. Complaints can originate from a variety of causes. Maybe the violation of state law, when some not very bright person is observed feeding an alligator, or because a visiting alligator from a neighboring community has lost its instinctive fear of man because it had been fed elsewhere and approaches rather than flees a human presence. Perhaps a human has been seen openly tormenting an alligator, or an alligator is perceived to be aggressive toward a person. If the ACE ascertains that any alligator over four-foot long poses a threat to humans, he will notify the State alligator trapper of the problem. Only that specific alligator will be captured, removed, and taken off the premises. The harvested alligator will be killed and later rendered into leather which is mostly destined for the European or Oriental markets, or into alligator meat for the culinary experience of someone who actually wants to eat part of an alligator in this day and age. To qualify for removal an alligator above the minimum size must exhibit a clear and present threat to people or their pets before its removal will be justified. Direct complaints from people living in Eagle Ridge Lakes to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), or the area's licensed alligator trapper, requesting an alligator's removal are no longer effective. Nuisance Alligator Program Permit Number 13181 controls the alligator take process on the condominium property, and the FWC-licensed trapper may enter Eagle Ridge Lakes only through the invitation of the ACE. And, finally, I'm the ACE at Eagle Ridge Lakes.

Charles LeBuff

April 6, 2007

POSTED COMMENTS/FEEDBACK ON THIS ARTICLE

I loved your newsletter, please keep them coming!! I am one of the residents that enjoys looking out and seeing the alligators in our lakes. They are so fascinating to me that I could watch them for hours... What was the result of the alligator count that you conducted a few months ago. I never did hear anymore about it. Thank you again for all the interesting facts. Barbara Ferguson

HELLO FROM FT MYERS!!!! (Received 4/8/07)

Editor's note — Eighteen residents participated in the ERL gator count/walk that was held on October 23rd of last year. We saw no alligators that night, but we all had a good time.

Way to Go Charles! As you are aware, I am one of those residents who wish to see the Alligators around our lakes. They were here LONG before we were and there are so few of them that truly pose a danger.

I hope that your concept carries on to many other communities in our area! You are an asset to our community and will continue to make Eagle Ridge Lakes one of the most desirable communities in our area by evaluating and eventually protecting some of the wildlife that makes us unique from other condominium communities.

Keep up the good work! Let's go count again by the light of the silvery moon!

Nancy Johnson (Received 4/9/07)

Enjoyed this article! I'm also one of those who love to see the alligators out there in your pond when we come over to visit ya'll. I'm very glad you are doing this project for your complex and also wish others would have someone do the same in the many resident complexes around Southwest Florida. Keep up the great work you are doing. There are many out there who do appreciate all you do for your community! Love the Newsletter and so excited you have had so many hits already! Congratulations! Gerri Much — North Little Rock, Arkansas and Sanibel Island (Received 4/9/07)

Charles, I would like to applaud you on your position on nuisance alligator removal. As you know I'm a lifelong student of Herpetology and for over 10 years owned a Crocodile Farm with 19 species residing there. There are only 23 species in the world. I'm also a 6th generation Florida Cracker and proud of it. I was fortunate to be a founding member of the S. W. Florida Regional Alligator Association started by the late George Campbell in the 1970s. This was an effort to negate the indiscriminate killing of alligators in and around the Ft. Myers area. We would catch the offending gators and release them elsewhere. That was when we discovered they often returned shortly to the point of capture. For obvious reasons the organization was eventually disbanded and the slaughter continues. Alligators pose an insignificant health risk to the public at large and many gators die because of ignorance of people living near them. In the last 20 years there have been less than 20 people killed by gators. The majority of those were either alligators that had been fed by people or people doing very STUPID things around large gators. As a large crocodylian alligators prefer small prey items. Only the largest gators would consider an adult human as potential prey. In light of all these factors gators get a

bad rap in the press. When someone is killed or attacked by a gator it is sensational news. This leads to a perception of public danger that does not exist. Alligators have lived here for millions of years. It's a damn shame we can't learn tolerance of these majestic reptiles. Thanks and keep up the good work. Tom Crutchfield (Received 4/15/07)

About 50 years ago, I crossed paths with Wayne Hostetler when we both lived in Naples, Florida. Wayne stayed in the area for about 12 years and later settled in northern Indiana. Now retired, Wayne is a wildlife writer and is an exceptionally talented, award-winning wildlife artist and sculptor. Dragon's Repast is an excellent example of his creativity. If a reader wishes to reach him, Wayne can be contacted by telephone at 574.936.6632. It's a pleasure to showcase his art and have him outline the approach and materials he used in creating this remarkable life-size work.

DRAGON'S REPAST

A FOLDER LABELED AMERICAN ALLIGATOR, *Alligator mississippiensis*, is one among many folders, each devoted to a specific species, filling a 4-drawer filing cabinet in a corner of my art studio. These files, my swatch file, are filled with numerous photos, from a variety of sources, of different species and are the basis of inquiry, details of morphology and color, in addition to many volumes in my personal library, when executing both two and three-dimensional artwork. Among the photos in the alligator folder is an expose by Laymond Hardy and an associate of a large male alligator capturing and consuming a large eastern diamondback rattlesnake. This photo essay appeared in the prestigious National Geographic Magazine in the middle late 1950s. I found these photos very dramatic and thought they might someday provide the basis for an art project. In addition, I knew Laymond Hardy. He had been one of my teachers while attending high school at Naples, Florida in the late 1950s.

A relatively recent two-month stay with a friend, George Weymouth of Sopchoppy, Florida, gave me access to a legal complete alligator skin of a specimen of 5-feet. Considerable time was devoted to measuring and drawing virtually every aspect of this specimen. Now armed with more than adequate detailed reference material, including a rattler preserved in formaldehyde and a skin of a diamondback, I planned to build an alligator with a rattler based on the idea presented by the photos of Laymond Hardy. My measurements could easily be extrapolated with a calculator. Additional considerations of these measurements were implemented to accommodate the disproportionate size of the head and neck of an old male alligator.

After carefully executing a complete set of plans and list of materials I began building a 12-foot male alligator with a 5-foot 10-inch diamondback rattler in its jaws. I would call the work DRAGON'S REPAST (repast being a single food item consumed on one occasion). Round dimensional steel stock, primarily 1/4-inch diameter with 1/2-inch used for the jaws and 3/4-inch for the legs was cut, shaped, and welded to form a frame for the alligator. The jaw was hinged to allow positioning of the snake when completed. Thin plywood, 1/8-inch, was pop-riveted to gussets welded to the frame and cut to establish vertical and horizontal parameters of shape. Two-inch builder's Styrofoam, glued up in layers to the plywood, provides a lightweight basis for the shape of the

animal. Rough shaping was accomplished using a keyhole saw and very coarse sandpaper. The feet are of 1/2-inch steel stock, the ends of which protrude and are ground into shape for the claws. Basic shaping of the feet is accomplished with quality polyester auto body filler (Bondo) built up in layers and ground into shape. The webs between the toes were placed in position during application of the auto body filler and are of 20 gauge galvanized steel. Areas between legs and body were built up in layers of paper mache. The throat, neck, and breast of the figure were left incomplete until after the snake was finished and placed in the gator's mouth. Carpenter's wood filler paste, applied in coats/layers, sanded after each application, was applied to the Styrofoam. The result was a smooth manikin on which to glue scales and osteoderms (literally bone-skin, plates of skin-covered bone that form the knobby armament of a crocodilian's back, neck, and tail). All of the detailing and special shaping over the whole of the work, including skin between scales, is accomplished with 2-part epoxy modeling compound. Equal parts of A and B are kneaded together resulting in a gray mixture that resembles glazier's compound. This material is easily shaped with dampened fingers and tools and has a work life of about three hours before beginning to set up. It cures completely in 24 hours, is extremely tough, and accepts paints. All of the osteoderms and the tail fin (riveted to the frame) are of thin plywood covered and detailed with the epoxy-modeling compound. The osteoderms were constructed individually and glued in place. The scales, on both snake and gator, are cut individually of 90-pound artist's rag paper and glued in place. On the alligator the scales were attached leaving 1/8-inch gaps between which were filled and textured using the modeling compound and the handle of a small paintbrush allowing distinct fissuring. A small amount of the modeling compound was applied to each scale and smoothed with the fingers providing texture. The gator's teeth are of hard wood doweling shaped both by hand and using a 1/2-inch drill as a lathe. The rattler was built on a simpler frame similar to that of the alligator and complete with an arrangement that allowed it to be bolted into the gator's mouth. Its scales, hand-cut of rag paper (4,236 scales), were completed with keels fabricated and applied individually where appropriate. It not only looks like a rattler, it feels like one. The head is of carved tupelo (Dremel tool), and the interior of the mouth shaped with epoxy modeling compound. The tongue (the little that's visible) is of sheet brass and the fangs of shaped aluminum stock. Its rattle is sculpted of epoxy modeling compound. The snake is entirely hand-painted. Once the snake was completed, bolted into the gator's mouth and to the mount, the alligator's mouth was closed and the hinge welded in place. At this time the throat, lower neck, and breast of the alligator were finished. Quality glass eyes for both animals were obtained through a taxidermist's supply house. Both air brushing and hand work were used in applying artist's acrylics to the alligator employing structure painting to further detail the subject. After completion of the animals involved the mount upon which they sit, left as a frame up to this point to allow access, was built under both alligator and rattler. The mount was veneered and trimmed with red oak (beautiful grain) and stained medium walnut to enhance the grain. The mount was, early in the procedure, placed on a welded steel frame equipped with castors to facilitate moving it. The finished mount, complete with alligator, rattlesnake, and habitat swatch weighs approximately 250-pounds and measures 120-inches in length (the gator has its tail curled thus allowing its 144- and 1/2-inch length on the mount), 42-inches in width, and 32-inches in height. This places both figures at a height that allows comfortable viewing. An asymmetrical patch

of habitat under the figures compliments and completes the work. The artificial soil of the habitat swatch is a mixture of coffee grounds (my wife saved coffee grounds for over a year for the project and I dried and stored them), hamster bedding (pet store product — wood chips), white glue, and water mixed in equal proportions. The small cypress knees are wood frames sculpted over with epoxy modeling compound and are complete with moss growing in the bark fissures. The portion of rotted log under the snake is fabricated in a similar fashion. A small prickly pear cactus, in bloom and a saw palmetto complete the tableau. Three 3-1/2 by 5-inch ornamental tags describe the work: 1. DRAGON'S REPAST, American Alligator, *Alligator mississippiensis*, 2. American Alligator, *Alligator mississippiensis*, adult male of 12-feet, 3-inches. Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake, *Crotalus adamanteus*, adult of 5-feet, 10-inches. All state: Created by Wayne W. Hostetler. DRAGON'S REPAST represents a time investment of 3,480 hours spread over several years.

Wayne Hostetler
April 29, 2007



DRAGON'S REPAST by Wayne Hostetler

MANATEE PLIGHT

I SPEAK AS AN OBSERVER OF MANATEES for forty-eight continuous years as a fishing guide on Sanibel-Captiva waters. Could it be true that we are protecting the manatee to the point of their demise?

"West Indian Manatees" were migratory animals for centuries, but humans decided that they were not. And, how did they come to that conclusion? There is a simple answer to that question. Because the manatee was present in the winter months when most people visit Florida, or moved here these past thirty or so years, everyone thought the manatee was native to Florida. In truth they are as native as the tourists that come here in the winter are. Whenever I make that statement it runs shivers up the spine of anyone associated with the "Save the Manatee Club" or the people that believe their propaganda. "We have fossil proof that the manatees were here for thousands of years," they will say.

I have no doubt that fossilized remains are found throughout Florida. But that doesn't mean they are native animals of Florida! All living things die, so I would imagine over thousands of years that some of those migratory manatees happened to die in Florida. I guess from that point on they could be considered native! There probably were a small number of "native" manatees around the Crystal River area of Florida, because of the warm water springs. But they were in the minority. If in truth the manatees we see today are the native species of Florida, and they supposedly have been here for thousands of years, why has their population jumped from just a few hundred in 1960 to close to four thousand today? Were they practicing birth control until 1960?

The answer to that question is simple (as many people have said) electric power plants built along the rivers of Florida. The warm water discharge of the cooling systems of the generators into the rivers created ideal conditions for the manatees in the winter months, and so they no longer migrated any further south than the power plants in their path. Because of this, we have what is now known as the "Florida Manatee."

Unfortunately for them, their population increase collided with the human increase in the State of Florida. Which of course meant an increase in boat traffic. As much as I hate to admit it, boat propellers can kill manatees. But, so does pneumonia, red tide, and other diseases. Remember this, more manatees die of natural causes than they do because of boats. One of the reasons is they are not cold water tolerant.

The point I would like to get across to those that are interested in the welfare of the manatee is this: Why do the power companies continue to heat the river waters when they don't have to do so anymore? From what I heard it's on behalf of the "Save the Manatee Club". Please correct me if I'm wrong! You would think they would be the first people to try to get the manatee out of harms way. But, then they would be out of business, I guess. If there were no warm water in the river the manatee would eventually go back to their migratory ways and be out of harms way during the winter months when most people are here! They would then reclaim their name as the "WEST INDIAN MANATEE," and live in peace.

I think it's about time that people realize the only danger to the manatee is our thought process! The manatee is in no more danger of extinction than man's ability to separate fact from hearsay. There is no way that this animal should be on an "endangered," or "threatened" list. This statement may sound foolish to those who think they are on the save the manatee bandwagon. And, I'll bet the majority of these people did not live here until after the growth of the manatee population. So, I'll put it this way: If the manatee is in fact a true native animal of Florida, and was not a migratory one, why has the manatee population grown from just a few hundred in the nineteen sixties to close to four thousand at this present date? A span of a mere forty some odd years! How in the world can anyone justify saying they are endangered with that information? If you saw a

manatee in the nineteen sixties it would make the newspapers. Now, there isn't a day on the water that you won't see one. At that growth rate if they were indeed native to Florida for thousands of years, as some people say, their population should outnumber humans! I guess they were on birth control until the nineteen sixties.

Captain Bob Sabatino

Sanibel, Florida

April 29, 2007