**Alligator** FASCINATIN’ FACTS

* Alligators are Keystone species. This means they provide critical natural services that support our island ecosystem, including:
* Digging “gator holes” during droughts that provide drinking water for all wildlife
* Building large nests that also serve as safe nesting areas for turtles, snakes, and lizards and hunting areas for small mammals, birds and reptiles
* Repeated movements by large alligators in water bodies help deter aquatic plant growth and keep open water
* As hunters, alligators control the population size of many species; as hunted, they provide food to mammals, birds, and other reptiles
* Among reptiles, female alligators are one of the most tender and dedicated mothers, protecting the nest for more than 2 months, digging the young out of the nest when they are hatching and carrying them down to the water; she may protect the young for up to a year after hatching
* Alligators and their kin are closely related to dinosaurs; their closest living relatives are birds
* Medical research on the effects of environmental pollutants (e.g. plasticizers, flame retardants) on alligators is showing how these same pollutants affect human health
* A 100 pound dog (warm-blooded animal) eats more in a year than an 800 pound alligator (cold-blooded animal)

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