

ANIMALS IN OUR ENVIRONMENT



Prepared by the Palmetto Hall

Environmental Committee

Compiled by Laura and Frank Hrubci

As residents of this beautiful South Carolina community, we share our habitat with a variety of wildlife species. While they may all be beautiful or exciting to see, it is important that we all become aware of which ones are potentially dangerous and what our behavior should be when we see them.

Alligators

Many lagoons in our plantation are home to the American Alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*). Most of our alligators are between 3 and 8 feet in length, although they can grow larger than this. Alligators are cold-blooded which means that they cannot self-regulate their body temperature. For this reason, alligators are most active during the spring, summer and fall. They often spend hours basking in the sun on lagoon banks in an effort to raise their body temperature. On the hottest days of summer, they spend much of their time submerged with only their eyes and nostrils above the water. During the winter months, they hibernate in underground dens.

Alligators mate in the spring and the female lays her eggs in secluded areas of the marshes. She will fiercely guard her nest against predators.

Alligators digest their food slowly and require only 1 pound of food per week. After a large meal an alligator may not eat for a year or more!

While the alligators may appear to be slow and lethargic, they are capable of great speed over short distances. Never approach within 60 feet of any alligator.

The following safety tips should be heeded when dealing with alligators:

- Leave alligators alone. It is against South Carolina law to feed or entice alligators with food. It is also unlawful to harass or harm an alligator in any way, including throwing objects at them.
- Closely supervise children if they are playing near the water.
- Don't allow pets, especially small ones, to go near the lagoon banks.
- Seek immediate medical attention if you should receive even a minor alligator bite. Alligators harbor a very infectious bacteria and a bite may require special treatment.

Palmetto Hall Plantation's Board of Directors has issued the following policy regarding alligators in our community.

In the event that a PHPOA member believes that they are observing aggressive behavior from one of the members of PHPOA wildlife population:

1. The member is to contact PHP Security at 342-6482 and describe the situation.
2. Security will:
 - a. Visit the site to observe the incident (to include animal as well as human behavior)
 - b. Document the incident and notify the Association Manager.
 - c. The Association Manager, with input from at least one other person (a member of the Environmental Committee, a Board member, or a member of the Security Advisory Committee, in that order), will determine what action will be taken.

3. Possible actions include:

- a. No action, or
- b. Counseling of the reporting family on how to detect aggressive behavior, and how to behave among wildlife. This should always take place, regardless of ultimate decisions, or
- c. With, if necessary, assistance of Critter Management, remove the alligator to another lagoon for observation and/or
- d. Contact Critter Management to handle the situation. If the alligator is removed, it is certain that this alligator will be destroyed. This decision is not to be made lightly.

When assessing the situation, it should be taken into account that wildlife is very rarely aggressive, and usually becomes aggressive only when taunted physically or with food. An alligator less than six feet long would almost never be considered aggressive.

This procedure also includes the accumulation of statistics regarding reports of aggressive animal behavior. When one family is responsible for more than one such report, this family is not only threatening our wildlife population, but also causing unreasonable expenditure of POA resources. At that point, the Environmental Committee will be asked to sit down with the family and discuss appropriate behavior in the presence of wildlife.

Please note that any calls to Critter Management **must** be made by Security or the Association Manager. Critter Management will not respond to requests from other parties.

If this policy is not strictly adhered to as stated, the resident(s) involved may be held liable for the costs associated with the alligator removal.

Coyotes

Those shrill yips and howls you might have heard late at night are being produced by some coyotes that have recently been seen and have taken up residence in our plantation. While coyotes once lived primarily in the western United States, today they thrive in most of North America. This is because the coyote has been able to adapt to any environment in which it lives. They eat a wide range of food including small animals, lizards, insects, grasses, fruits, nuts and just about anything else including garbage. The howls and yips are thought to be their way of communicating with other coyotes in the area.

The scientific name for coyote is *Canis latrans*, which means "barking dog" in Latin. The coyote is a member of the dog family. In size and shape the coyote is like a medium-sized Collie dog, but its tail is round and bushy and is carried straight out below the level of its back. They typically weigh between 20 and 50 pounds. Coyotes are active day or night, but usually most active at sunset and sunrise.

Most of the time, coyotes will avoid contact with humans and this is the way we want to keep it. If we make attempts to feed them, or leave pet food or garbage out where they can find it, they start to lose their fear of people and become bolder in approaching humans.

Safety precautions are obvious. Do not attempt to feed coyotes or attract them to your property. Since coyotes eat small animals as a regular part of their diet, keep your small pets indoors or close to your home under

your observation. If you have concerns about coyotes that have been spotted near your house, you should notify Security.

Sources:

<http://www.wildflorida.org/gators/faq/lwa.htm>

<http://www.kiawahisland.org/residents/wild1.php?ID=45>

http://www.desertusa.com/june96/du_cycot.html

http://www.nationalgeographic.com/kids/creature_feature/0005/coyote.html

<http://www.wildflorida.org/critters/coyote.asp#Food>