Why I Am Not Allergic to ‘GATORS--UGH!'
--or am I not?

by
Will Branan

The familiar tabby makes a very good household pet and I am not averse to taking milady’s pooch for a stroll of convenience, although I am sometimes disturbed by questions of etiquette that would even faze Miss Emily Post.

But I am very much opposed to the introduction of Mr. Gator or any of his relatives into the family circle.

To paraphrase a popular refrain, I do not care for him as a playmate. I am not desirous of having him slide down my cellar door. So far as I am concerned he can stay in his own back-yard, his own puddle or whatever his habitat may be.

It may be instinct or the old sub-conscionous at work. Mayhap one of my pre-deluvian ancestors served as a choice hors d’oeuvre for Mr. Gator before his noon-day siesta.

In any event the tea leaves tell me that I should count ten before poking my head into Mr. Gator’s oral cavity.

I am moved to these reflections by a study of Mr. Gator’s dental work. It is possible that he neglected his matutinal teeth-brushing or failed to see his dentist once a year—but if that is the case it has had no perceptible effect on his teeth, which appear to be in perfect condition.

The expression on his face is quite benign, albeit a bit mysterious, as if he were an off-spring of the Sphinx and Mona Lisa, saying, ‘Why are you afraid, my good fellow? I am not very hungry to-day. Just a bite here and there—perhaps a nip of the precious posterior.’

It is true I never encountered anyone who had suffered the loss of a cross-section of his epidermis through the guile of Mr. Gator, but the fact remains that Mr. Gator possesses all of the instruments with which to perform a neat little operation. And not having the Eddie Cantor or Irvin Cobb facility of realistic narration when it comes to operations, I am perfectly willing to forego the compensating notoriety.

MR. GATOR MAY BE AN ALTRUIST—LIKE HITLER

Mr. Gator’s intentions may be all that they should be, as altruistic as those of Mr. Hitler, but I am still reminded that a certain region is paved with such material. No doubt he would give me the same consideration that he would give an old friend, a relative or member of the family—but I am constitutionally and temperamentally opposed to a journey through his digestive tract, however interesting and exciting that experience might be.

While Mr. Gator seems to prefer a steady diet of crabs, crayfish, shrimp, birds and snakes, he is not averse to eating the members of his own family and when his appetite was particularly good he has even been known to devour his own grand-mother (B. Munch. p. 2339). About the only thing that seems to disagree with his digestion is a whiskey flask, which cuts its merry way through his anatomy after it has been crunched in his jaws.

It is therefore advisable for sportsmen to transport their liquid refreshment in kegs, or barrels, instead of a flask, as Mr. Gator is on our conservation list of picturesque exhibits.

Alligators are more or less aquatic reptiles, belonging to the great sub-class Diapsida, which includes all reptiles that have a skull with two temporal openings separated by a postorbital-squamosal arch and a shoulder girdle with a single coracoid, but no cleithrum. I read that in a book, but even if Mr. Gator has no cleithrum (which may or may not be to his credit) that is after all a question of less importance when he gets his bite as the question whether or not there is a doctor in the house. Preferably a 'gator-bite specialist.

However, Mr. Gator does not appear to be overly fond of man, even in his most succulent form, whereas the dog or hog is more to his taste and he has been known to imitate a floating log in order to deceive these dumb animals. He appears indifferent to the approach of man.
and has seldom gone out of his way to attack him.

It is quite possible that he regards man as an inferior animal, beneath his notice, and as we compare his abilities under certain conditions we cannot es- cape the conclusion that he may be cor- rect.

The marsh-land of coastal Louisiana is one of the ideal habitats of the alligator. Here is a wealth of grass, water lilies and other aquatic plants one encoun- ters those narrow winding tracks that lead to the gator hole, which is rarely more than a few yards in diameter. Underneath the surface of the water will be found the en- trance to a large subterranean cave, which is both a gator hole and a fish haven. Here Mr. Gator takes refuge at the drier season's approach.

Your Louisiana angler will wade through a marsh-land stream to cast his line for the wary bass, giving no heed to Mr. Gator or the ladies of his harem summiting themselves on the bank at the edge of the stream—suddenly they come to life and glide noiselessly into the water.

The alligator, I am telling you, is a doughy soul. He fears nothing on earth, has no enemy but his own. When under water he is a match for any large fish that comes near him, and catch my bass at the French Market than take a challenge from the ap- parently tough Mr. Gator's breakfast.

CHARACTERISTICS THAT ARE GOOD—AND NOT SO GOOD

Mr. Gator's characteristics that man might consider desirable—and some that are not desirable. He has no lips, which is certainly a handicap from the viewpoint of the lips. None of those lower lip teeth, those of the lower jaw, are exposed and quite prominent, even when his mouth is shut, which suggests that it may be the better part of valor to maintain a respectful distance from his eye.

Take a good look at these teeth in the picture. They are conical, without roots, and hollowed out internally. When lost they are replaced—not by store specimens or "dentures," but by an additional tooth which grows. In fact, Nature has been less kind to man than to Mr. Gator. There is much to be said in favor of his teeth which we might wish to emulate.

Turning to his head on his short stick neck to any appreciable degree, he bends his entire body like a bow, and while reach- ing for his victim with his jaws he keeps his tail with tremendous force.

It is recorded that an alligator nine or ten feet in length, supposedly dead, once snapped, its tail still remained bent. The man weighing about 200 pounds, hurled itself several breaks and breaking one of its legs.

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