



Alligators

➤ WHAT BETWEEN handbags and shoes and shooting just for fun, the native supply of these interesting reptiles is rapidly diminishing, and only in the Everglades and in some of the wilder regions of the Gulf Coast can one any longer find the 12-foot "grand-daddy 'gators" once boasted by every southern river. Six-footers are still fairly common, however, and four-foot adolescents are thick as sparrows.

However, no one need dread to go about on river sides in the South for fear of being knocked into the water and devoured by an alligator. Authentic cases of attack on human beings by these creatures, formidably jawed and toothed though they are, are even more rare than attested instances of man-eating sharks in American waters.

Alligators are for the most part content with smaller game; incautious fish, turtles, ducks that mistake their still forms for floating logs, and foolish pigs that venture out into shallows.

Alligators are not merely animate inventions of the powers of darkness and evil, designed for the discomfiture of the seeker for climatic paradises. They have their useful work to do. In addition to being scavengers wherever they happen to live, in the flood-menacing and levee-guarded rivers of the South, they are policemen as well.

Bank-burrowing aquatic animals, especially muskrats, constantly endanger the protecting embankments with their mining, and alligators as constantly keep their num-

bers down. For this reason, the people of Mississippi, Louisiana and other southern states desire the protection of the alligator; and the old custom of taking potshots at the floating reptiles from the decks of passing boats is being discouraged.

Whether you see "tame" alligators at an alligator farm, or with luck, a real out-of-door 'gator in a pond or river, they may give you a mild case of the "creeps," for they seem to belong to an earlier and crueller age of the earth. You sometimes hear the remark, "descendants of the dinosaur."

Alligators are not descended from the dinosaurs, though they are cousins to them. The dinosaur line died out completely, leaving the honor of being the largest reptiles to the crocodiles and alligators, which were the lesser people in the Tertiary swamps.

Alligators are pretty strictly an American institution. They are distinguished from their Old-World relatives, the crocodiles, by a number of features. But crocodiles are not strictly Old-World beasts. There are crocs in South America and even the tip of Florida occasionally yields up an authentic crocodile.

A southern delicacy that not many people have the chance to try is 'gator-tail steak. Running down the length of the tail, around the spinal column, is a thick cylindrical column of muscle. When an alligator is killed for his leather, the hunters frequently cut out a section of this, slice it into suitable thicknesses, and broil it over a swampwood fire—first-class eating, so it is reported.

Science News Letter, November 13, 1954

MEDICINE

Blood Pressure Lowered By Drug in First Trials

➤ GOOD RESULTS with first trials of a new blood pressure lowering drug that is taken by mouth were announced by Dr. Keith S. Grimson of Duke Medical School and Hospital, Durham, N. C., at the meeting of the American College of Physicians in Philadelphia.

The new drug is called Su-3088. Chemically, it is dimethylaminoethyl tetrachloroisindolene bismethochloride. It was synthesized by Dr. Albert J. Plummer and associates at the Ciba Foundation, Summit, N. J.

One small tablet of Su-3088 taken before breakfast reduces blood pressure to normal throughout the day, Dr. Grimson found in trials with 15 patients.

"This drug is not for mild hypertension (high blood pressure) or for severely advanced patients who have coronary, renal or cerebral damage," he said. "It may, however, prove to be helpful for a great majority of hypertensive patients, and at one tablet a day should be a real financial saving."

The drug achieves its blood pressure lowering effect by its action on nerve centers. In this it is like hexamethonium and related compounds. In the trials so far, however, it seems to be more uniformly effective when given by mouth.

Although only small quantities have been available so far, more is now being made.

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BIOLOGY

Awards for Summer Study

➤ THE ESTABLISHMENT of 20 new awards for summer research in the field of biological science was announced by the Lalor Foundation, Wilmington, Del.

Designed for college faculty members, the awards will be granted to those qualified applicants who are engaged in biological studies in which chemistry or physics play a key role.

In making the announcement, C. Lalor Burdick, director of the Lalor Foundation, said that this is a new type of aid to science and science education. The awards permit the recipients to study and do research of entirely their own planning and choice of place to work.

Each grant carries a stipend not to exceed \$900 for single men and women and not to exceed \$1,100 for married persons.

In outlining the new awards program for 1955, the Lalor Foundation also announced that it will continue its eighth year of underwriting awards for postdoctoral summer fellowships administered by the Marine Biological Laboratory at Woods Hole, Mass.

The Foundation is discontinuing its previous program of awarding fellowships for full-year undergraduate and graduate work.

The Lalor Foundation was organized in 1935 and the interest from its endowment has been used principally for fellowships to aid researchers in chemistry and allied sciences.

Inquiries concerning the new summer faculty awards should be directed to C. L. Burdick, Director of the Lalor Foundation, 4400 Lancaster Pike, Wilmington 5, Del.

Science News Letter, November 13, 1954

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