

WELCOME TO GULF SHORES

GUIDELINES FOR LIVING WITH WILDLIFE©

Available for residents online at

<http://www.sanibelworld.com/>

Prepared by the Gulf Shores Wildlife Committee
May 2014*



NOTE: If you see an injured bird or animal, call the Clinic for The Care and Rehabilitation of Wildlife (CROW) at 239-472-3644, or if you feel it is safe to do so, take the injured animal to the CROW hospital which is east of Gulf Pines on San-Cap Rd across from the Sanibel School.

Dear Neighbor:

Welcome to Gulf Shores! People often choose our community for its abundant native vegetation, the beautiful lagoons, and our proximity to native wildlife. Because of our location you should expect to encounter a range of wildlife from birds, turtles, and alligators to snakes and tortoises on your property, in the lagoons and on our common areas. Some residents regularly see otters, bobcats, and coyotes that wander over from the conservation lands that surround Gulf Shores north and east.

The mutual coexistence of people and nature is at the heart of Gulf Shores vision on living with wildlife. Therefore it is critically important for you, your guests and people who work on your property to follow the Gulf Shores Guidelines as well as state and Sanibel regulations with respect to wildlife in our community.

Living with Alligators

Background: Alligators live in fresh water all over Florida and in lagoons and canals in Gulf Shores. They are keystone predators essential to an ecological balance in Florida's wetlands. It is critical for Sanibel to maintain a population of breeding alligators. Alligators are not able to reproduce until they are 6-8 ft long (a 6 ft gator is an adolescent; a 4 ft gator is a youngster). We need large mature gators (8-12 ft) if we are to maintain a viable population of alligators on Sanibel and in Gulf Shores.

Please abide by these guidelines:

1. Never swim or stand next to fresh water in Gulf Shores. Keep children and pets away from fresh water as alligators often rest at the water line and will often swim up

to see what is going on when they hear noises or vibrations in the water. **Walk your dogs on a leash and on the roads at all times** so that they do not run up to or into the water. Small-medium size dogs are the same size as gators' natural prey (raccoons, for example). **Do not bend over at the water's edge** as a reduced profile could cause a gator to see you as prey.

2. Never feed alligators as it is prohibited by Florida state law and Sanibel code. Feeding causes gators to lose their natural fear of humans and perceive people as a food source. Feeding endangers the next person the alligator sees and will cause the death of the gator (and often other gators) as it will be killed as aggressive when it approaches other people. Trappers often take out other gators they happen to see when going after an aggressive one. The state has trappers kill gators they take as it has been shown that alligators have a homing instinct and will return to where they were captured.

Alligators basking near the small pool in winter.



3. Appreciate the need alligators have to bask in the sun in winter and wander about during mating season in spring and summer. Alligator behavior is seasonal. Gators have to sun themselves in the cooler months as they are cold blooded (ectothermic) and cannot function until their bodies warm up. Alligators control their body temperature by basking in the sun or moving to areas with warmer or cooler air or water temperatures. Alligators are most active when temperatures are between 82° to 92° F (28° to 33° C). They stop feeding when the ambient temperature drops below approximately 70° F (21° C) and they become dormant below 55° F (13° C). They are not looking for a meal during the coldest months.



The alligator mating "rumble" in spring.

Once it warms up in the spring, alligators become active and begin to wander about looking for mates. Wandering across a road or across your property does not mean they are aggressive towards humans. They are looking for love. Or males may be defending territory from other gators. We find it exciting to hear gators' growly

mating calls and (from a safe distance) see water jumping off their backs as they call out for mates.

4. Ensure that your family, your guests and workers leave alligators alone and do not harass them. In Florida it is illegal to harass alligators, which includes anything that makes them defensive (throwing things at them, rushing up to them, shouting at them, etc.). We suggest people stay at least **20 feet away** from gators at all times. Never let a child get between a gator and you.

5. However, if you do feel threatened by an alligator (for example you see a large gator walking straight towards you or others on your property) **quickly go to safe place and call one of us** (see below) so we can work at understanding and modifying the gator's behavior.

Alligators by nature are not aggressive towards humans. A gator is not aggressive when it is sunning himself on a bank or walking across the road. These are normal gator behaviors. Aggressive alligators approach people head on. That is, an alligator is considered aggressive if it sees a person and then chooses to walk directly up to that person. Usually this happens when an alligator has been fed and associates people with food. Or when people have approached an alligator nest protected by the mother gator. It is extremely rare to encounter an alligator on Sanibel that is aggressive towards people.

When a non-aggressive gator encounters people (it comes to where people are or people come to where it is) the gator will normally hiss, perhaps open its mouth, hunker down and then take off for the nearest water. These are defensive actions. This happened to one of our residents his

first month here when he surprised a gator in his driveway early one rainy summer morning. Both he and the gator ran to places where they felt safe.

If you have any problems with alligators, please immediately contact one of these people who will come help you:

PAUL KIEFER 1043 BLUE HERON DR. 239-492-3863

SUSAN BROWN 4408 WATERS EDGE LN 239-492-1009

DON BOWERS 1085 FISH CROW RD. 239-246-6287

ANN DWYER 4460 WATERS EDGE LN. 239-395-2263

Living with Snakes, Turtles & Gopher Tortoises

Background: The very reclusive coral snake is the only venomous snake on Sanibel, and it is highly unlikely residents will ever see one. The snakes usually seen in Gulf Shores are black racers (see photo), yellow rat snakes, and the beautiful red and yellow corn snakes. Snakes are ecologically important in regulating rodent populations so please do not harm them. We also have freshwater turtles and gopher tortoises in Gulf Pines. Sea turtles, mostly loggerheads, visit our area and lay eggs on our beaches.

Please note that gopher tortoises are land animals and a highly protected keystone species as many other animals depend on their burrows. Gopher tortoises will die if a human mistakes them for a fresh water turtle and places them in a lagoon or thinks they are sea turtles and moves them into the Gulf.

Sea turtles come ashore from May to August to lay their eggs on the beach or sometimes up in the plantings beyond the beach. It is critically important that **no light can be seen from the beach at night** or the turtles and their hatchlings may head towards that light instead of the water. Sanibel's Dark Skies policy requires only down lights for all of our homes.

Please follow these guidelines:

1. Watch out for snakes, turtles and gopher tortoises



on our roads. These animals cross our roads and sometimes bask on them in cold weather. Please do not let your dog approach these animals. If you see a turtle or tortoise in the road in danger of being run over, you may want to gently nudge it or move it to the side where it is headed. However, please note that snakes and turtles can bite, so use a box, towel or other materials to protect yourself.

2. Do not leave any belongings or trash on the beach when you leave it. Be especially careful in

removing any plastic bags as they resemble jellyfish, sea turtles' natural prey. Ingested plastic kills turtles, fish, dolphins and other animals.

3. Fill in any holes and flatten any mounds (such as sand castles) made on the beach before you leave as sea turtles (mothers and hatchlings) need level sand in order to navigate the beach.

4. Never feed any animals you see or leave food where wildlife may find it.



Peninsular Cooters live mostly in fresh water.



Gopher Tortoises live on land.

Living with Birds, Mollusks, Other Sea Life

Background: Most injuries to birds, manatees, dolphins and other sea life come from human activity such as fishing, boating, leaving trash on the beach/water or placing poisons outside. However, with our care and awareness, wildlife does not need to suffer from our activities.

Please follow these guidelines to protect our birds and sea life:

1. Never feed wild birds, bike up to, chase, or disturb them (City Ordinance 00-23 prohibits feeding wild birds). Do not allow birds or other animals to eat fish you catch. Walk around birds that are eating or resting on the beach. Keep dogs well away from birds. Birds depend on the beach to feed, dry off and for some birds, sleep.

2. If you fish on the beach, take everything -- all hooks, fishing line (City Ordinance 00-23), fish parts and fishing equipment off the beach when you leave. Hundreds of sea birds are killed each year on Sanibel by entanglement in monofilament line or by ingesting hooks or bones of large fish.

3. If you accidentally hook a bird, slowly pull it in towards you. If possible cover the bird with a towel (it will quiet down usually) and call CROW at 239-472-3644 or call one of the people listed under the alligator section for help. If you are able to do so, you may want to take the bird to CROW. It is only a mile east of Gulf Shores on San-Cap Road across from the Sanibel School.

4. Do NOT simply cut the line. If you do so you are dooming that bird a horrific death and possibly other birds or wildlife.



SCCF marks sea turtle nests. Please keep dogs away.



An osprey nest in Gulf Pines

5. Do not disturb nesting birds. Eagles, ospreys and other birds nest in Gulf Shores. Noise or intense activity can cause the parents to leave nestlings. Keep dogs far away. Barking dogs can scare parents off the nest and leave the chicks vulnerable.

6. We strongly urge residents not to use poison bait outside (sometimes referred to as black boxes). Since poison may take days to kill a mouse or rat, a poisoned rodent is often eaten by owls, eagles, snakes or bobcats, which then die from the poison. See *Alternatives to Poison* in the Resources at the end of this booklet.



7. Do not remove live sea shells (FDEP Rule 46-26). Sanibel law says people can only take shells where the

animal has died. If the animal is still in the shell, place it gently back into the Gulf.

8. Do not approach dolphins, manatees, sea turtles or other sea life that you see in the water or in the surf.

9. No unattended fishing poles are allowed by Sanibel law.

10. Unattended furniture is not permitted on the beach between 9pm and 7am (City Ordinance 97-07 & 98-07).



Manatees mating in the surf off our beach

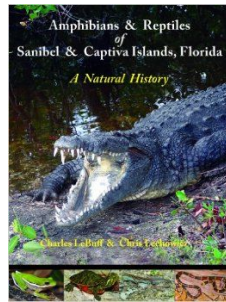
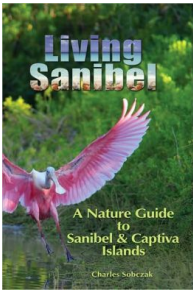
Resources on Local Wildlife

We highly recommend visits to:

The Sanibel Captiva Conservation Fund (SCCF) works to conserve and maintain habitat for the island's wildlife, sponsors lectures and programs on different animals and oversees turtle nesting on the island. For example, for statistics on turtle nests on Sanibel see <http://www.sccf.org/content/143/Sea-Turtles.aspx>

The Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge has educational programs on wildlife and is a premiere site for viewing birds and other wildlife.

The Clinic for the Rehabilitation of Wildlife (CROW) attends to ill, wounded, distressed or orphaned wildlife and has educational programs about animals on the island. CROW is the place to call if you see an animal in distress.



[Living Sanibel: A Nature Guide to Sanibel & Captiva Islands](#) by Charles Sobczak, (Feb 3, 2010)

[Amphibians and Reptiles of Sanibel and Captiva Islands, Florida](#) by Charles LeBuff and Chris Lechowicz, (Jan 15, 2014)

Alternatives to rat poisons

<http://www.raptorsarethesolution.org/alternatives-tips/>

Video of ospreys fishing

<http://www.arkive.org/osprey/pandion-haliaetus/video-00.html>

Video of brown pelicans mating, nesting, chick coming out of shell <http://www.arkive.org/brown-pelican/pelecanus-occidentalis/video-09a>

Audubon Online Bird ID Guide <http://birds.audubon.org/birdid>

Research on Alligator Courtship Behavior

<https://www.alligatorfarm.com/images/Research/Courtship%20Behavior%20of%20American%20Alligators.pdf>

Gopher Tortoise

<http://www.gophertortoise.org/tortoise/facts.htm>

I Love Shelling <http://www.iloveshelling.com/> Information on on shelling as well as birds and other animals on Sanibel beaches.

Crocodile Specialist Group—Crocodilians Natural History and Conservation <http://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/cnhc>

Living with Bobcats <http://sanibel-captiva-islander.com/page/content.detail/id/511066/-Living-With-Bobcats--research--education-ongoing-at-SCCF.html>

Please Note: Each home in Gulf Shores should have a **plastic-coated list of requirements** for workers.

If your home does not have these, please call or email PAUL KIEFER, the Wildlife Committee Chair, at 239-472-3863, KIEFERPK@COMCAST.NET.

With advice from SCCF and CROW, this booklet was originally produced by the 2013-2014 Gulf Pines Wildlife Committee:

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Gulf Shores Wildlife Committee