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Alligator Predation on Round-tailed Muskrats

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Alligator predation on round-tailed muskrats.—Although Walker (1964) and Neill (1971) list the alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*) as a predator on the round-tailed muskrat (*Neofiber alleni*) neither cited a source for their information. Birkenholz (1972), in a review of the life history of *Neofiber*, did not list the alligator as a predator.

On 31 March 1970, a dead 2 m-long alligator was collected on U.S. Route 441, 5 km south of Gainesville, Alachua Co., Florida by Larry Barwick of the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission and me. When the specimen was necropsied at the Department of Veterinary Science, University of Florida, the complete bodies of 6 adult *Neofiber* were found in the stomach and small intestine. Little digestion had taken place, suggesting that the muskrats had been ingested shortly before the alligator was killed.

The highway where the alligator was killed was built on an elevated dike crossing an extensive marsh, Payne's Prairie, which was the site of Birkenholz's (1963) study. He found that during periods of flooding on Payne's Prairie, muskrats congregated in large numbers on elevated areas such as the highway dikes and that these animals were especially vulnerable to predation by hawks and owls. The prairie was flooded by unusually heavy rains in February and March of 1970, and it is possible that the alligator had been drawn to the highway by a concentration of muskrats.

McIlhenny (1935) stated that where muskrats (*Ondatra*) and alligators occur together in Louisiana, muskrats are the principal food taken. The same situation may exist in Florida where *Neofiber* and alligators occur together. With the exception of 11 alligators examined by Kellogg (1929), no analysis of the stomach contents of adult alligators has been done in Florida, so the importance of the species as a round-tailed muskrat predator cannot be assessed.

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