

Baby Alligator on Campus

by Jessica Thompson, Public Information Office

The recent addition of a new baby American Alligator to the science department at Cape Fear Community College aims to enhance student learning about local wildlife.

Biology professor Daniel Norris received the alligator in early December from the St. Augustine Alligator Farm located in Florida. Norris hopes that the alligator will instill interests in students for organisms they don't normally see on a daily basis.

Norris also states that students will gain more exposure to wildlife, specifically those species found in our local region. As a born and raised native of Wilmington, local species are especially important to Norris.



The species name of the American Alligator is *Alligator Mississippiensis* and it is the most commonly seen alligator in southeastern North Carolina. The approximate length of a fully-grown alligator is about 15 feet, growing on average about 1 foot per year. Norris explains that in about three years CFCC will trade in their current alligator for another juvenile alligator to the St. Augustine Alligator Farm. This is to ensure that the alligators have adequate space to live in as they grow and that they are not being kept in captivity for the full extent of their lives.



The alligator is 4 months old and its current home is a 115-gallon tank, arranged with rocks, water and small fish. The tank is kept at 85 degrees, which helps the alligator to digest its food. Norris adds that students especially enjoy feeding time, when he hand feeds the alligator small goldfish. This however, will only last so long before the alligator becomes too large to handle. Norris has suffered a few minor bites, but as the alligator grows, its teeth and jaw will become much stronger.

Norris adds that throughout his college career he was greatly inspired by his professors while earning his BS in Marine Biology from UNCW and his MS in Biology and Ecology from the University of Guam. Norris hopes to inspire his students in the same way and his motto is, "to instill within people an appreciation for biology that is not confined by the pages of a textbook."

If you would like more information concerning the alligator or would like to enter into Mr. Norris' name



contest for the alligator, please visit his website at www.cfcc.edu/faculty/dnorris.