

# Alligators are wearing little 'hats' in South Carolina. It's all part of a study

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Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Gadgets that resemble little black hats are showing up on the heads of alligators in South Carolina.

They're actually GPS trackers.

The South Carolina Department of Natural Resources posted an alert about the devices on Dec. 27, and revealed they're being attached as part of a joint study with Clemson University. The number of alligators involved was not released.

"That data will allow researchers to understand where these animals are spending their time and gain a better understanding of their habitat use over multiple seasons," [state officials](#) wrote on Facebook.

Multiple people who have seen the state's photos of the trackers have noted they look a bit comical attached to predators with 80 to 100 teeth.

"When I first saw this post, I swear I thought this gator had a mini top hat on ... Now I can't unsee it!" Shaun Dumont wrote on the wildlife department's Facebook page.

State officials didn't explain how the devices are attached, but suggested it's not painful. They also noted the gadgets are stuck on the gators' upper backs, not their heads, so any resemblance to a hat is coincidental.

"Each alligator is safely captured, has a tag attached to its back, and is then released," state officials wrote. "The process happens in the alligators' natural habitat and takes less than an hour to complete."

Alligators can get up to 14 feet long and weigh 1,000 pounds in South Carolina, according to state officials. The reptiles are found mostly in a diverse series of habitats along the Coastal Plain, including tidal marshes, swamps, rivers and lakes, Clemson University officials said in a report.

Researchers say the GPS trackers will help them "understand how

landscape features affect [habitat](#) use and how their movement between habitats influences the accuracy of population estimates."

Clemson University's Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research first tried using GPS trackers on alligators in 2014, but didn't disclose findings.

Questions have been raised in recent years about whether [global warming](#) and rising seas might encourage alligators to spread inland in both Carolinas.

Biologists in the Carolinas believe it's unlikely alligators will migrate west, because the region does not have the interconnected wetlands alligators prefer for mating, nesting and raising young, The Charlotte Observer reported in 2017.

Still, multiple alligator sightings have been reported in the Charlotte region since 2017, including two run over in traffic. (One in Union County, N.C., and one in York County, S.C.)

A 5-foot alligator was found dead in the Catawba River near Charlotte last year, and the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission reported finding a live [alligator](#) in High Rock Lake in April.

Experts believe the two were pets released after they got too big, the Observer reported.

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