

have allowed us to approach so near to him ; for these reptiles are much shyer than formerly, since they have learnt to dread the avenging rifle of the planter, whose stray hogs and sporting dogs they often devour. About ten years ago, Mr. Couper tells us, that he saw 200 of them together in St. Mary's River, in Florida, extremely fearless. The oldest and largest individuals on the Altamaha have been killed, and they are now rarely twelve feet long, and never exceed sixteen and a half feet. As almost all of them have been in their winter retreats ever since the frost of last month, I was glad that we had surprised one in his native haunts, and seen him plunge into the water by the side of our boat. When I first read Bartram's account of alligators more than twenty feet long, and how they attacked his boat and bellowed like bulls, and made a sound like distant thunder, I suspected him of exaggeration ; but all my inquiries here and in Louisiana convinced me that he may be depended upon. His account of the nests which they build in the marshes is perfectly correct. They resemble haycocks, about four feet high, and five feet in diameter at their bases, being constructed with mud, grass, and herbage. First they deposit one layer of eggs on a floor of mortar, and having covered this with a second stratum of mud and herbage eight inches thick, lay another set of eggs upon that, and so on to the top, there being commonly from one hundred to two hundred eggs in a nest. With their tails they then beat down round the nest the dense grass and reeds, five feet high, to prevent the approach of unseen enemies. The female watches her eggs until they are all hatched by the heat of the sun, and then takes her brood under her care, defending them, and providing for their subsistence.* Dr. Luzenberger, of New Orleans, told me that he once packed up one of these nests, with the eggs, in a box for the Museum of St. Petersburg, but was recommended, before he closed it, to see that there was no danger of any of the eggs being hatched on the voyage. On opening one, a young alligator walked out, and was soon after followed by all the rest, about a hundred, which he fed in his house, where they went up and down the stairs, whining and barking

* Bartram, p. 126.