

The Crocodile

Crocodiles belong to a class of animals known as reptilians. Other reptiles include alligators, snakes, turtles, tortoises and lizards. They are cold-blooded animals, which means their bodies take on the temperature of their surroundings.

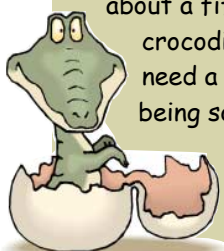
The crocodile's body is long and flattened and it has a very powerful tail. The skin on its back is hard and bony, while on its underbelly it is soft. It has a long snout and impressive teeth, which are used for grabbing and crushing its prey. These teeth are not used for chewing however, instead they swallow stones to grind food in their stomach and also to weigh themselves down. It takes huge pressure to close the crocodile's jaw but the jaw is very weak when it comes to opening it again. A crocodile sweats through its mouth and can be seen trying to cool down on the riverbank with its mouth open.

Crocodiles live mostly in freshwater rivers and lakes but some live in saltwater. It is the saltwater crocodiles that are the biggest. Crocodiles are found in many parts of the world, from S.E. America, the northern part of South America, Africa, S.E. Asia to N. Australia.



Poaching

The skin on the underbelly of the crocodile is prized and is used to make bags, shoes and belts. As it is valued, poaching of crocodiles is a problem and has led to a number of species of the animal becoming endangered.



Crocodiles and their Young

Crocodiles, like other cold-blooded animals, reproduce by laying eggs. The female lays from 10 to 100 eggs in a nest, which it digs about 3 m into the ground - only about a fifth of the eggs will hatch into young crocodiles called hatchlings. The crocodiles need a good memory to find the eggs again but being so well hidden will prevent the eggs from being eaten by predators. Crocodiles are good mothers and look after their offspring.



An American Crocodile.

Crocodiles and their Relatives

There are 23 species of crocodylians in the world, which includes crocodiles, alligators and caimans. Crocodiles and alligators look very similar. Their snout and teeth can help tell them apart. Crocodiles have a longer, wider snout and the fourth lower teeth in the crocodile's jaw are visible when the mouth is shut.



The largest species of crocodile is the Saltwater Crocodile, which can grow up to 7 metres in length.

Feeding Time!

Crocodiles are carnivorous. They pretty much eat anything that it can grab in the water or near the water - fish, amphibians, birds, buffalo, deer, large wild animals and even domestic animals that drink at the water's edge.

Crocodiles sometimes feed together, overcoming larger animals and storing the carcass below the waterline until it is ready to be eaten.

