# [Crocodile](https://a-z-animals.com/animals/crocodile/):

# **Crocodile Classification and**[Evolution](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/evolution/) Crocodiles are one of the most well-known and fearsome [animals](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-animal) in the world. Their powerful bodies, strong jaws and immense speed and agility along with their unparalleled stealth, has lead to them being one of the world's most apex [predators](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-predators) in their [natural environments](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-natural-environment). Closely related to other crocodilians including [alligators](https://a-z-animals.com/animals/alligator/), [caimans](https://a-z-animals.com/animals/caiman/), and [gharials](https://a-z-animals.com/animals/gharial/), crocodiles have changed very little in an evolutionary sense in 200 million years. Unlike other [reptile](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-reptile) [species](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-species), crocodilians are archosaurs which is an ancient [group](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-group) of [reptiles](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-reptile) that also included dinosaurs. Although dinosaurs became [extinct](https://a-z-animals.com/animals/endangered/extinct/) 65 million years ago, crocodiles are thought to have survived so well over time due to the fact that they are so well suited to their [environments](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-environment). Today, there are 13 different crocodile [species](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-species) that are found inhabiting both fresh and saltwater [environments](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-environment) throughout North and South America, [Africa](https://a-z-animals.com/animals/location/africa/), [Asia](https://a-z-animals.com/animals/location/asia/) and [Australia](https://a-z-animals.com/animals/location/oceania/australia/). Their semi-aquatic nature has led to them evolving a number of key adaptations that allow them to survive so successfully in their natural environments. **Crocodile**[Anatomy](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/anatomy/)**and Appearance** Crocodiles are large sized [reptiles](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-reptile) with thick, scaly skin that is made up of armoured, waterproof plates that both protects them from potential [predators](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-predators) and also prevents their bodies from drying out. These scales come in a variety of [colours](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-colour) from dull olive and green, to brown, greys and black meaning that they are very easily camouflaged in the surrounding water and vegetation. Like other crocodilian [species](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-species), their eyes and nostrils are located on the very top of their broad head and snout so that they can lay in wait in the water with almost none of their bodies exposed in [order](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-order) to more successfully ambush [prey](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-prey). Their vertically flattened tails are immensely strong and are used to propel them through the water, as although they do have webbed feet, they do not use them to aid them when swimming. In [order](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-order) to protect them in the water, crocodiles have a special transparent third eyelid which allows them to leave their eyes open but prevents damage from the water. They also have external flaps that close off their ears and nostrils, and a special [respiratory system](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-respiratory-system) that allows them to remain in the water for up to five hours at a time. Crocodiles range in [size](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-size) from the less than 2 metre long [dwarf crocodile](https://a-z-animals.com/animals/dwarf-crocodile/) to the 7 metre long estuarine crocodile (also known as the saltwater crocodile or "saltie"), which is the world's heaviest [reptile](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-reptile) weighing up to 1,000kg. **Crocodile Distribution and**[Habitat](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-habitat) Crocodiles are found in a variety of wetland [habitats](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/habitats/) throughout the warmer tropical waters in the southern Hemisphere. Their inability to internally regulate their body [temperature](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-temperature) means that they rely heavily on the sun to warm their bodies up after it being cooled by spending time in the water. The American Crocodile is the largest crocodilian [species](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-species) in North and South America and is found inhabiting [freshwater](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/freshwater/) rivers and lakes, along with brackish coastal waters near estuaries and in lagoons from southern Florida, throughout Central America and into northern parts of South America. Over in [Africa](https://a-z-animals.com/animals/location/africa/), the Nile Crocodile was once widespread in eastern and southern [Africa](https://a-z-animals.com/animals/location/africa/) but are now scarcer. They inhabit [freshwater](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/freshwater/) marshes, rivers, lakes and mangrove swamps. The world's largest and most widely dispersed crocodile [species](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-species) is the estuarine crocodile. These formidable reptilian giants are found in river mouths and brackish swamps from the Bay of Bengal in the [Indian Ocean](https://a-z-animals.com/animals/location/ocean/indian-ocean/), across to and throughout Southeast [Asia](https://a-z-animals.com/animals/location/asia/) and down into Australia. **Crocodile**[Behaviour](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/behaviour/)**and**[Lifestyle](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-lifestyle) In the same way as other [reptiles](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-reptile), crocodiles are not able to regulate their body [temperature](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-temperature)themselves and instead rely heavily on the heat of the sun to warm their enormous bodies up. During the hot daylight hours, they bask in the sun on the riverbanks warming their bodies up from a night of hunting. Smaller [species](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-species) like the [dwarf crocodile](https://a-z-animals.com/animals/dwarf-crocodile/) (which is the least well-known of the crocodile species) are also known to climb trees in [order](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-order) to bask on the branches. Another way crocodiles are able to regulate their body [temperature](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-temperature) is by bobbing up and down in the water, warming in the sun on the surface and cooling themselves down beneath it. Crocodiles are highly sociable [animals](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-animal) that remain together in large, mixed [groups](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-group) of adults and juveniles. However, when the mating season begins, the males become highly territorial and protect their stretch of river bank from intrusion by competitors by rearing their large heads high up into the air and and roaring at intruders. When female Nile crocodiles are attracted by these noises, the males begin to thrash their bodies around and even shoot water into the air from their nostrils. **Crocodile**[Reproduction](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-reproduction)**and Life Cycles** After mating, the female crocodile lays between 17 (dwarf crocodiles) and 100 (Nile crocodiles) eggs in a nest made up of soil and vegetation such as leaves, which prevents the eggs from becoming too cold should the nest become flooded during incubation. In areas prone to flooding, they are also known to build nest mounds to raise the eggs out of the danger from flood waters. The [incubation period](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-incubation-period) is usually around 3 months long with hatchlings often emerging to coincide with the beginning of the rainy season to prevent their bodies from drying out. Despite their fearsome reputation, female crocodiles are incredibly caring mothers and guard their nests fiercely to protect them from [predators](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-predators) until they are ready to hatch. Once the hatchlings begin to emerge, the female crocodile then helps them down to the water by carrying them in the throat pouch in her mouth. Interestingly the thin-shelled, leathery eggs of crocodiles (and indeed other more modern [reptile](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-reptile) species) was an evolutionary breakthrough for many [species](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-species) as their protective layer and waterproof nature meant that females could lay their eggs on land rather than in water, even in the driest of places, meaning they could be better protected from predators. **Crocodile**[Diet](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/diet/)**and**[Prey](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-prey) Crocodiles are highly carnivorous and formidable [predators](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-predators) and at the top of the [food chain](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-food-chain) in their [natural environments](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-natural-environment). Their inability to chew food has led to the development of ambush hunting techniques, and strong powerful jaws with teeth that are used to tear food apart. Young crocodiles rely heavily on [fish](https://a-z-animals.com/animals/fish/), crustaceans, and small [mammals](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-mammal), [birds](https://a-z-animals.com/animals/bird/) and [reptiles](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-reptile), but as they grow larger they are able to take much bigger [prey](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-prey) [species](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-species) including, [deer](https://a-z-animals.com/animals/deer/), [zebra](https://a-z-animals.com/animals/zebra/) and [water buffalo](https://a-z-animals.com/animals/water-buffalo/). Crocodiles are often more active during the night, with some [species](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-species) being known to venture onto land to catch [prey](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-prey), livestock and in some cases, people. Due to their highly sociable nature, Nile crocodiles (which predominantly feed on fish), are known to work together in [order](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-order)to cordon [fish](https://a-z-animals.com/animals/fish/) off in sections of river when they are migrating. [Catfish](https://a-z-animals.com/animals/catfish/) make up a large portion of their natural [diets](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/diet/) and by keeping their numbers at bay, this allows small [fish](https://a-z-animals.com/animals/fish/) [species](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-species) to still thrive. These [fish](https://a-z-animals.com/animals/fish/) (which would ordinarily be quickly eaten by the larger catfish) then provide food for over 40 [species](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-species) of [bird](https://a-z-animals.com/animals/bird/), that in return fertilise the waters with their droppings and keep them rich with nutrients so numerous [animal](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-animal) [species](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-species) can continue to thrive. **Crocodile**[Predators](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-predators)**and Threats** Due to the large [size](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-size) and highly aggressive nature of these apex [predators](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-predators), adult crocodiles have very few [predators](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-predators) within their [natural environments](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-natural-environment) with the exception of occasional takings by big [cats](https://a-z-animals.com/animals/cat/) such as [lions](https://a-z-animals.com/animals/lion/), [jaguars](https://a-z-animals.com/animals/jaguar/) and [tigers](https://a-z-animals.com/animals/tiger/). The smaller and much more [vulnerable](https://a-z-animals.com/animals/endangered/vulnerable/) juveniles however, are preyed upon by a number of [animal](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-animal) [species](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-species) around the world from wild [pigs](https://a-z-animals.com/animals/pig/), [dogs](https://a-z-animals.com/animals/dog/)and large [reptiles](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-reptile) to [birds](https://a-z-animals.com/animals/bird/) of [prey](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-prey) like [eagles](https://a-z-animals.com/animals/eagle/). Although they are common in certain areas, crocodiles are [threatened](https://a-z-animals.com/animals/endangered/threatened/) throughout much of their natural ranges from hunting, [habitat](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-habitat) loss and ecological changes further down the [food chain](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-food-chain) due to overfishing or water pollution, which then has an impact on them higher up the food chain. **Crocodile Interesting Facts and Features** Although most crocodile [species](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-species) inhabit [freshwater](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/freshwater/) regions such as swamps, rivers and lakes, there are a number of [species](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-species) that venture into more salty waters around the coasts. American crocodiles are often found in estuaries and lagoons close to the shores but are able to deal with the higher salinity levels by drinking large amounts of [freshwater](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/freshwater/) whenever possible, and by removing salt from the body by secreting crocodiles tears through the glands on their face. In periods of drought, they are also known to burrow deep into the mud in [order](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-order) to stop their bodies from drying out and will not eat anything until the water returns. On the other side of the world, estuarine crocodiles have been observed eating pebbles found on the riverbeds. The process of this is thought to help to grind up their food, therefore aiding digestion but also acts as a ballast to help with buoyancy while floating on the surface of the water. **Crocodile Relationship with**[Humans](https://a-z-animals.com/animals/human/) The relationship between crocodiles and people has been a long-lasting point of contention for thousands of years. Their highly aggressive and powerful nature of attack on [predators](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-predators) has resulted in numerous [human](https://a-z-animals.com/animals/human/) fatalities an on annual basis, with some people actually having been hunted by crocodiles as well as in ambush on the banks of the rivers. Although death toll numbers are declining due to better education and local knowledge about the formidable nature of these enormous [reptiles](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-reptile), around 1,000 deaths are still estimated to occur every year. Crocodiles all over the world have also been heavily hunted for their tough, waterproof skins which are used in the manufacture of clothing including coats, bags and shoes. Crocodiles have also been affected heavily by increasing [human](https://a-z-animals.com/animals/human/) activity in many regions around the world, with the expansion of settlements and an increase in river traffic due to hunting, fishing and tourism. **Crocodile**[Conservation Status](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-conservation-status)**and Life Today** Today, although some local populations are thought to be stable, throughout much of their natural ranges the population numbers for all crocodiles [species](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-species) are declining. Out of the 13 different crocodile [species](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-species), 6 has been listed as [Least Concern](https://a-z-animals.com/animals/endangered/least-concern/), 2 have been listed as [Vulnerable](https://a-z-animals.com/animals/endangered/vulnerable/)and 5 have been listed as [Critically Endangered](https://a-z-animals.com/animals/endangered/critically-endangered/) by the IUCN. Of all of these [species](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-species), the [Philippine](https://a-z-animals.com/animals/location/asia/philippines/) crocodile is by far the most at risk with less than 200 individuals estimated to remain in the wild.

# Crocodile Facts:

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| [Kingdom](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-kingdom): | Animalia |
| [Phylum](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-phylum): | Chordata |
| [Class](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-class): | Reptilia |
| [Order](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-order): | Crocodilia |
| [Family](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-family): | Crocodylidae |
| [Genus](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-genus): | Crocodylus, Osteolaemus, Mecistops |
| [Scientific Name](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-scientific-name): | Crocodylus acutus, Crocodylus intermedius, Crocodylus johnsoni, Crocodylus mindorensis, Crocodylus moreletii, Crocodylus niloticus, Crocodylus novaeguineae, Crocodylus palustris, Crocodylus porosus, Crocodylus rhombifer, Crocodylus siamensis, Osteolaemus tetraspis, Mecistops cataphractus |
| [Common Name](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-common-name): | Crocodile, Croc |
| [Other Name(s)](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-other-names): | American crocodile, Orinoco crocodile, Freshwater crocodile, Philippine crocodile, Mexican crocodile, Nile crocodile, New Guinea crocodile, Mugger crocodile, Estuarine crocodile, Cuban crocodile, Siamese crocodile, Dwarf crocodile, Slender-snouted crocodile |
|  | |
| [Group](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-group): | Reptile |
| [Number Of Species](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-number-of-species): | 13 |
| [Location](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-location): | North, Central and South America, Africa, Asia, Australia |
| [Habitat](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-habitat): | Rivers, lakes, marshes, lagoons, mangrove swamps and estuaries |
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| [Colour](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-colour): | Dull olive, grey, brown, black |
| [Skin Type](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-skin-type): | Plate-like scales |
| [Size (L)](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-size): | 1.7m - 7m (5.5ft - 23ft) |
| [Weight](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-weight): | 18kg - 1,000kg (40lbs - 2,200lbs) |
| [Top Speed](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-top-speed): | 40kph (25mph) |
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| [Diet](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-diet): | Carnivore |
| [Prey](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-prey): | Fish, crustaceans, deer, buffalo |
| [Predators](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-predators): | Humans, Large felines, Birds of prey |
|  | |
| [Lifestyle](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-lifestyle): | Nocturnal |
| [Group Behaviour](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-group-behaviour): | Social |
|  | |
| [Lifespan](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-lifespan): | 20 - 70 years |
| [Age Of Sexual Maturity](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-age-of-sexual-maturity): | 4 - 12 years |
| [Incubation Period](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-incubation-period): | 3 months |
| [Average Clutch Size](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-average-clutch-size): | 17 - 100 |
| [Name Of Young](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-name-of-young): | Hatchling |
| [Age Of Independence](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-age-of-independence): | 1 - 2 years |
|  | |
| [Conservation Status](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-conservation-status): | Least Concern, Vulnerable, Critically Endangered |
| [Estimated Population Size](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-estimated-population-size): | Unknown |
| [Biggest Threat](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-biggest-threat): | Habitat loss and hunting |
|  | |
| [Most Distinctive Feature](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-distinctive-features): | Eyes and nostrils located on top of the head and snout |
| [Fun Fact](https://a-z-animals.com/reference/glossary/#jump-fun-fact): | Known to eat pebbles to aid digestion and buoyancy! |