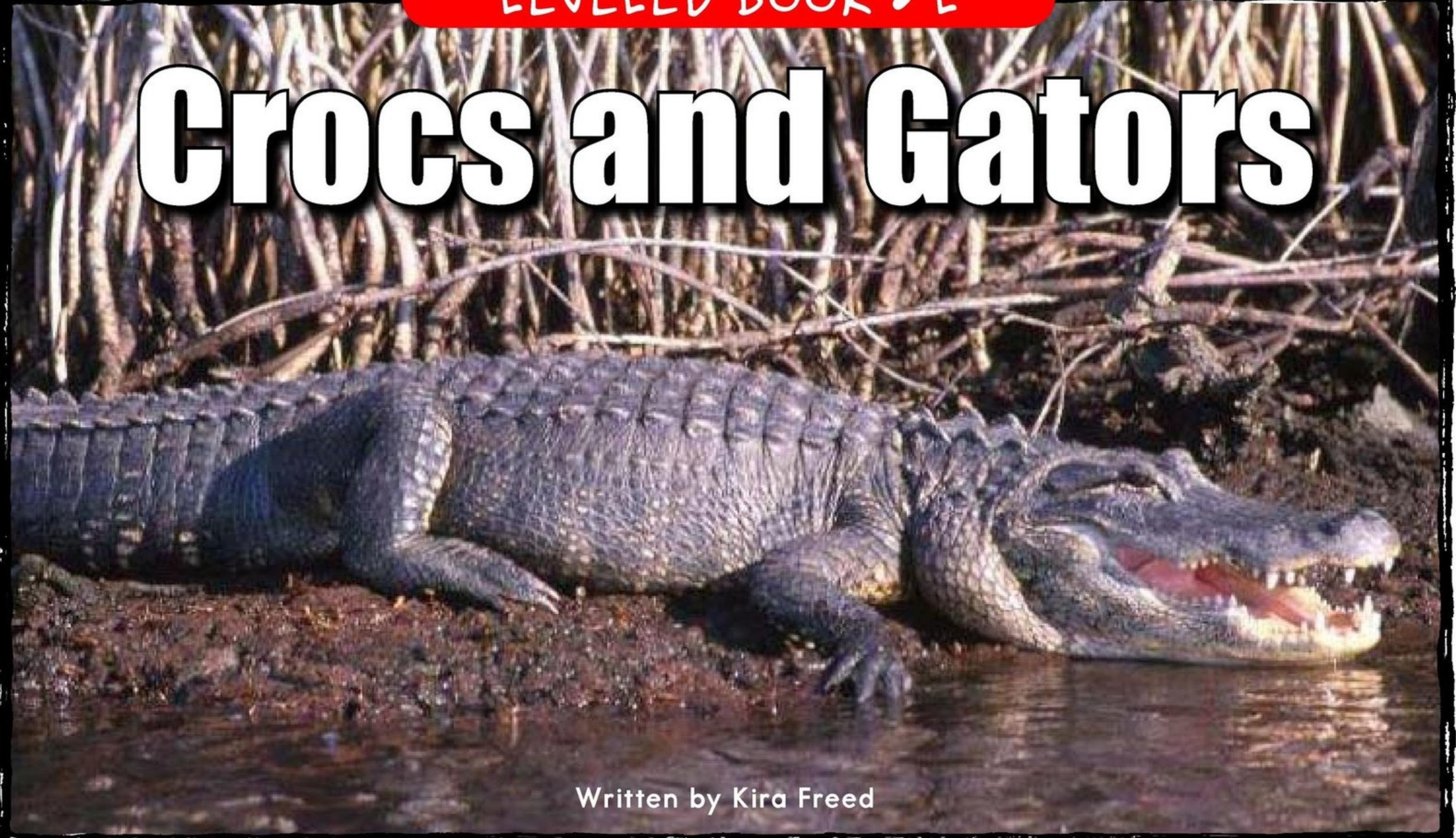


LEVELED Book • L

Crocs and Gators



A large alligator is shown resting in shallow, brownish water. Its head is above the water, with its mouth slightly open, revealing its teeth and tongue. The alligator's body is dark and textured with scales. The background consists of dense, tall grasses and reeds.

Written by Kira Freed

Crocs and Gators



Written by Kira Freed



Alligator ready to attack

Never smile at a crocodile. That's what the song from the movie *Peter Pan* says. After all, one bit off Captain Hook's hand. Everyone thinks that crocodiles are fierce animals. And, in fact, they are.



Caiman

Crocodiles and alligators—like snakes, turtles, and lizards—are reptiles. They are members of a group of reptiles called *crocodilians*. Crocodilians have been on Earth since the age of dinosaurs. They even look a little like some of the dinosaurs from long ago.



Alligator

Crocodilians spend time on land and in water. They use lungs to breathe. They have thick, scaly skin. Their body temperature does not stay the same like yours does. Instead, it changes with the temperature of the air and water around them. If it is too hot, these reptiles seek cool, shady places.



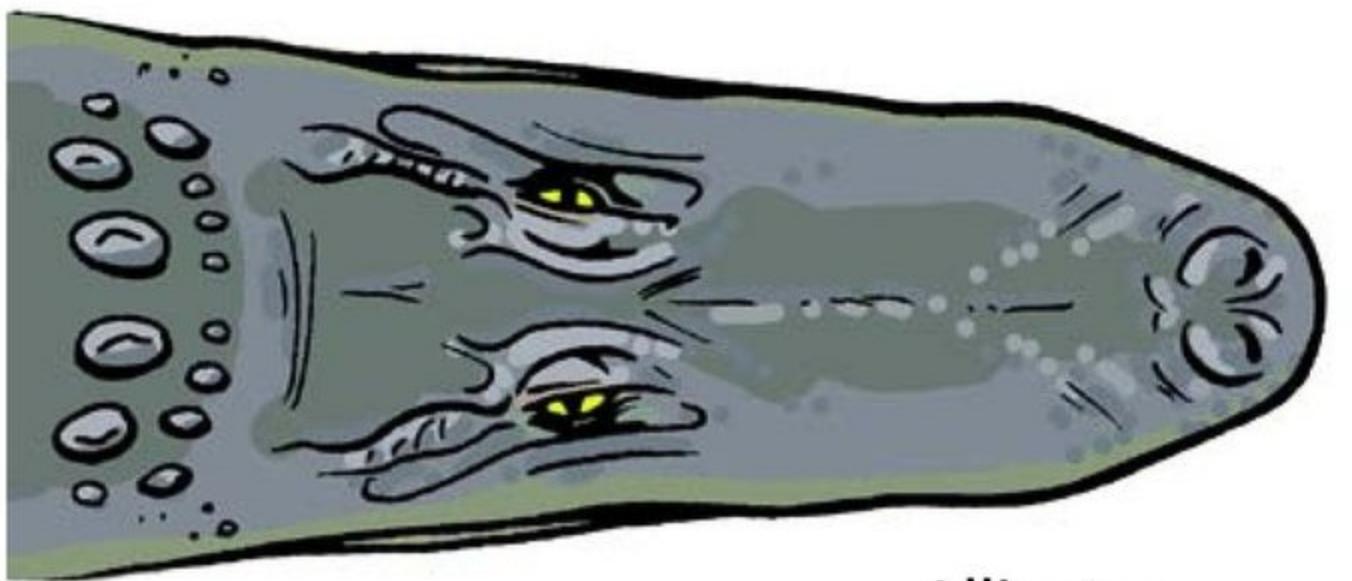
Alligator

Crocodilians live mostly in shallow water, swamps, and slow rivers. Most live in fresh water. But there are saltwater crocodiles, too. In fact, the saltwater crocodile may be the biggest reptile. Some reach lengths of over 7 meters (23 ft).



Alligators

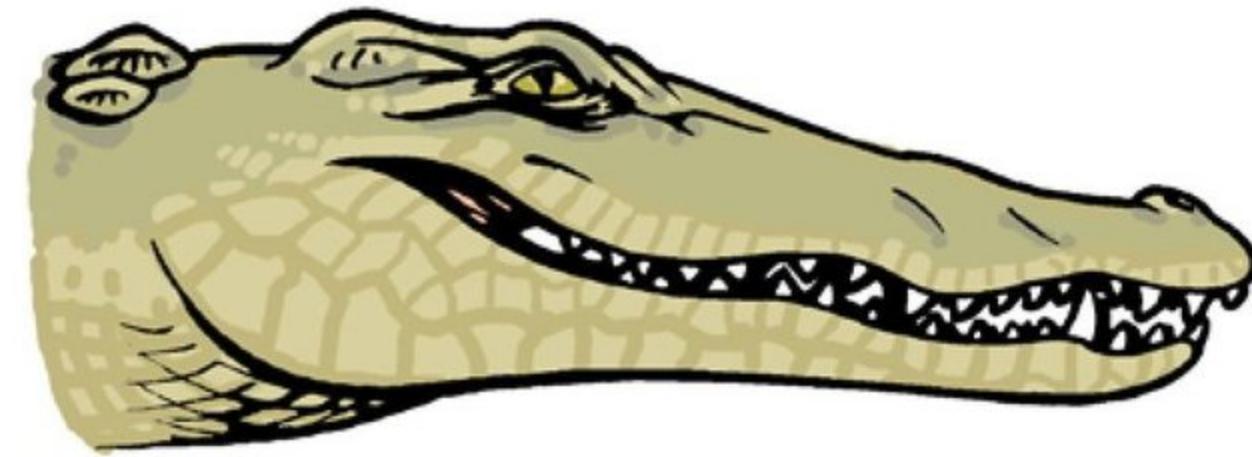
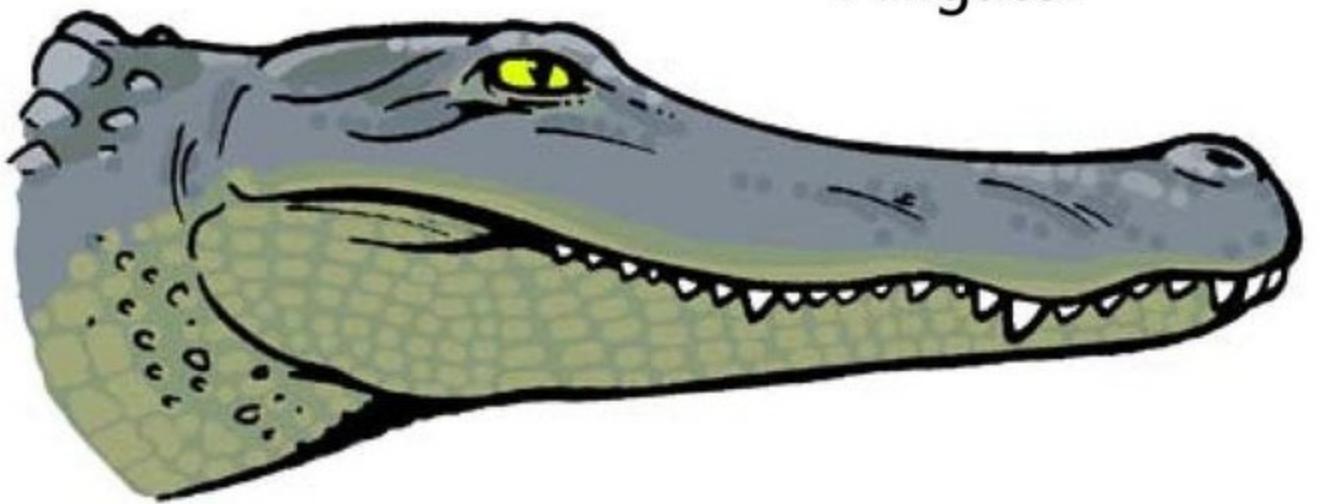
All crocodilians have short legs, and long bodies and tails. The four kinds of crocodilians have different kinds of jaws and teeth. All of them have sharp teeth. Let's meet the different kinds of crocodilians.



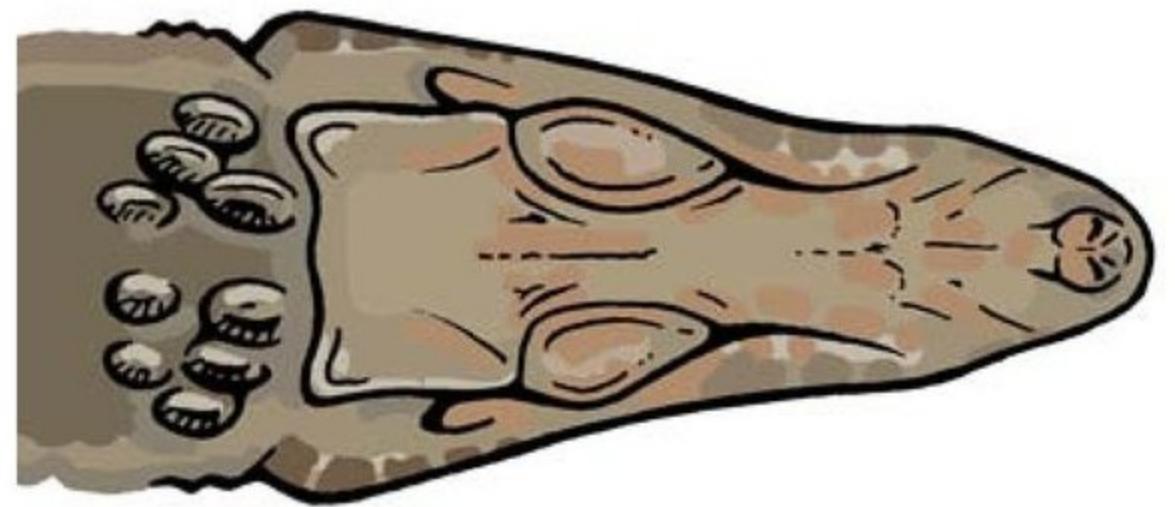
Alligator



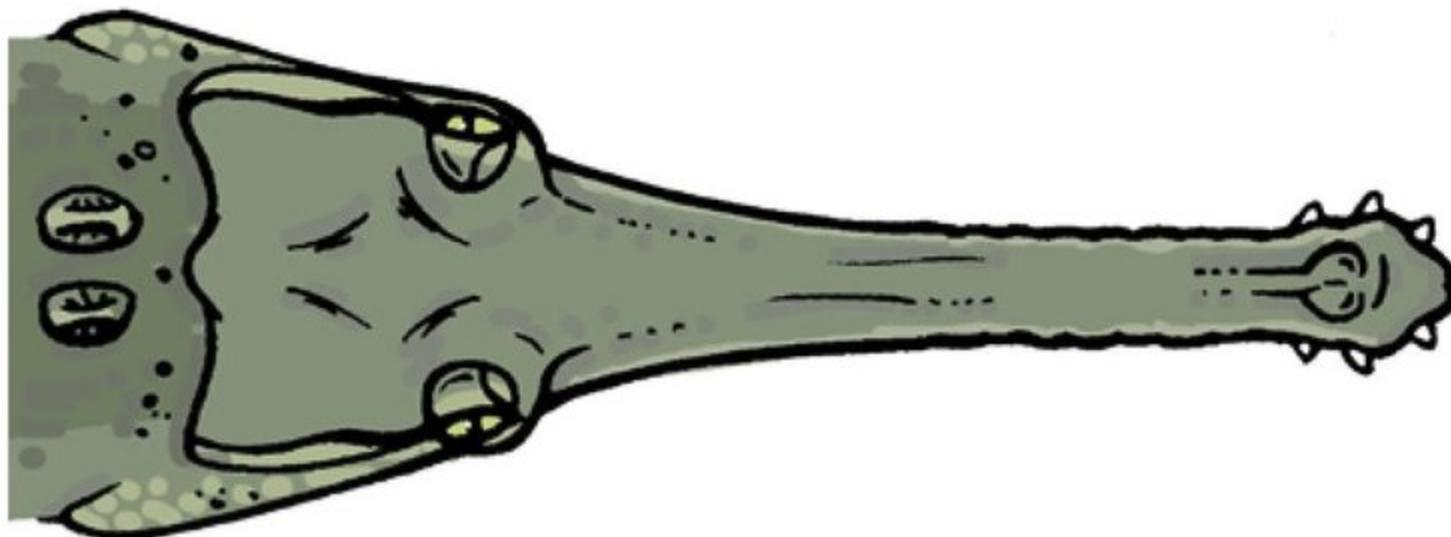
Crocodile



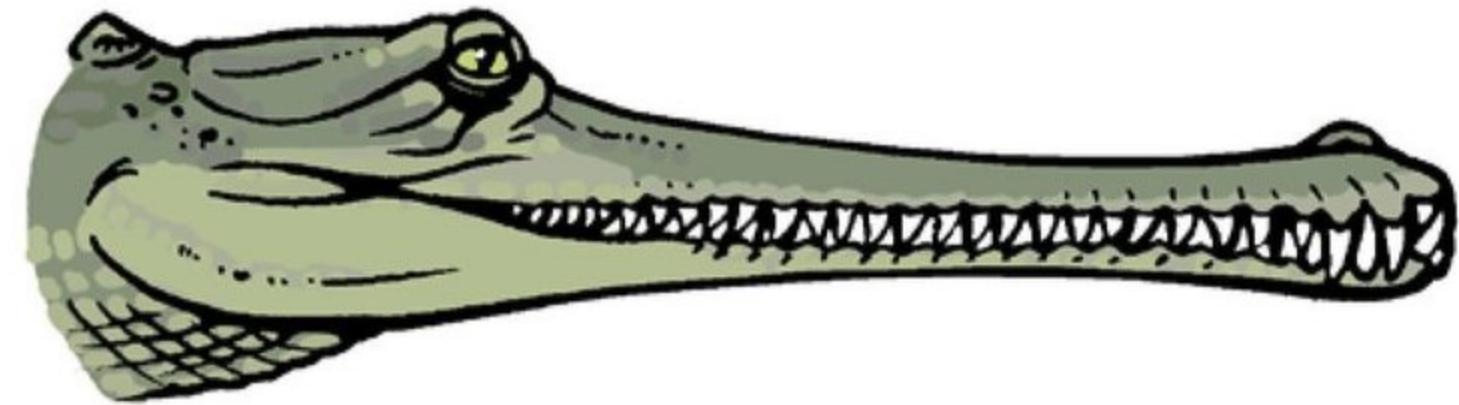
Alligators have short, broad snouts. **Crocodiles** have narrower snouts than alligators. They also have two large teeth that stick out. The drawings on this page show what alligators and crocodiles look like.



Caiman



Gharial



Caimans live in Central and South America. The shape of their head is similar to that of a crocodile. **Gharials** are fish-eaters that live in India. They have long, narrow snouts. The drawings on this page show what caimans and gharials look like.

Crocodilians are hard to see in water. Only the tops of their head and back show. They often look like a floating log. While they are swimming, their eyes and nostrils stick out of the water. They can still see and breathe when they are mostly underwater.



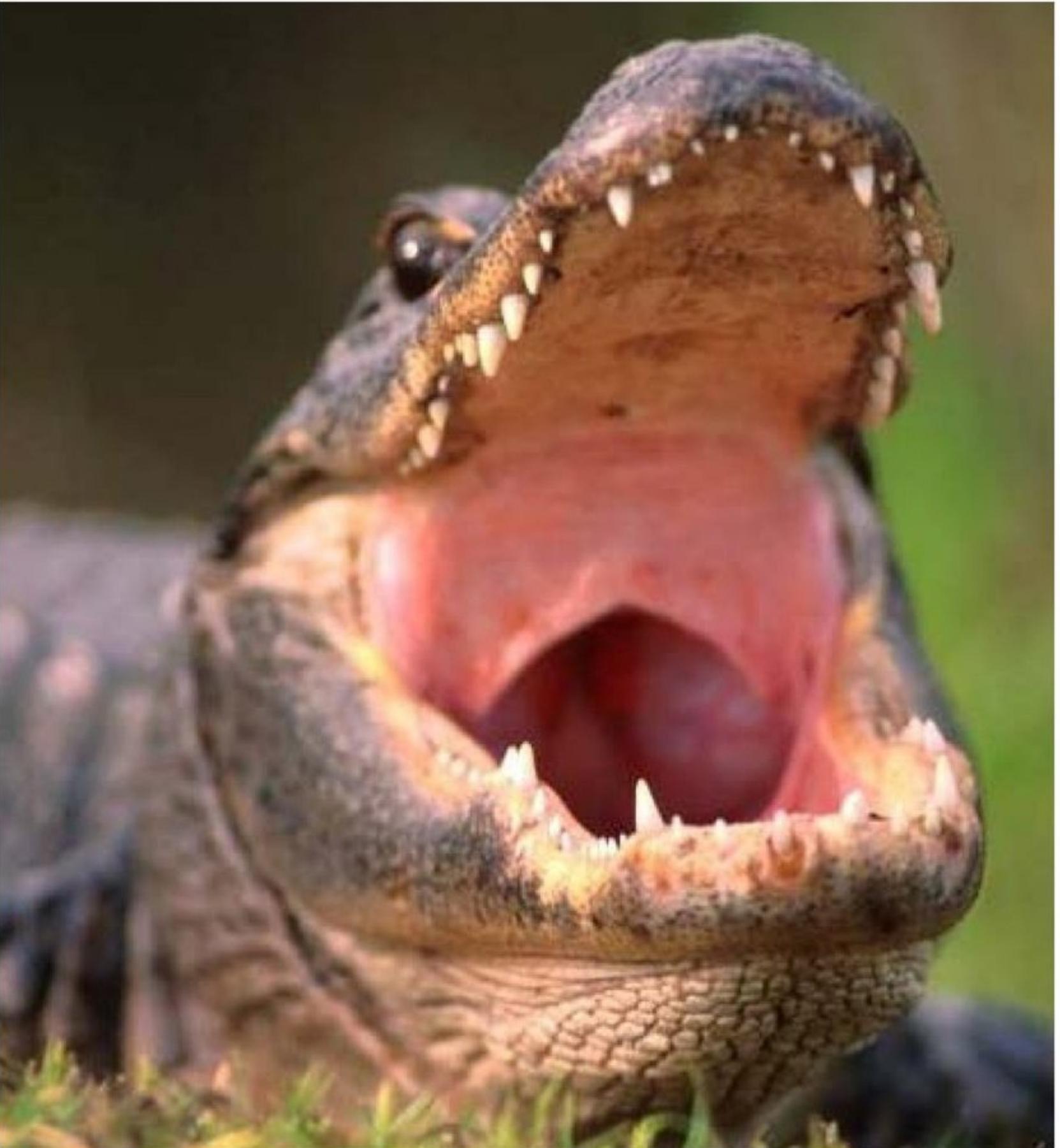
Crocodile with eyes and nostrils out of the water



Crocodilians are good swimmers.

Crocodilians use large, powerful tails and webbed feet to move through water. When underwater, they close their ears and nostrils so that water stays out. They can also shut off their windpipe. This allows them to open their mouth without breathing in water.

Crocodilians are fierce hunters. They use strong jaws to capture their prey. They eat animals as big as deer and cattle, and as small as fish and birds. They also will attack people. They cannot chew their food. They either swallow it whole or tear it apart. Sometimes they drag an animal underwater to drown it.



Crocodilians have powerful jaws.



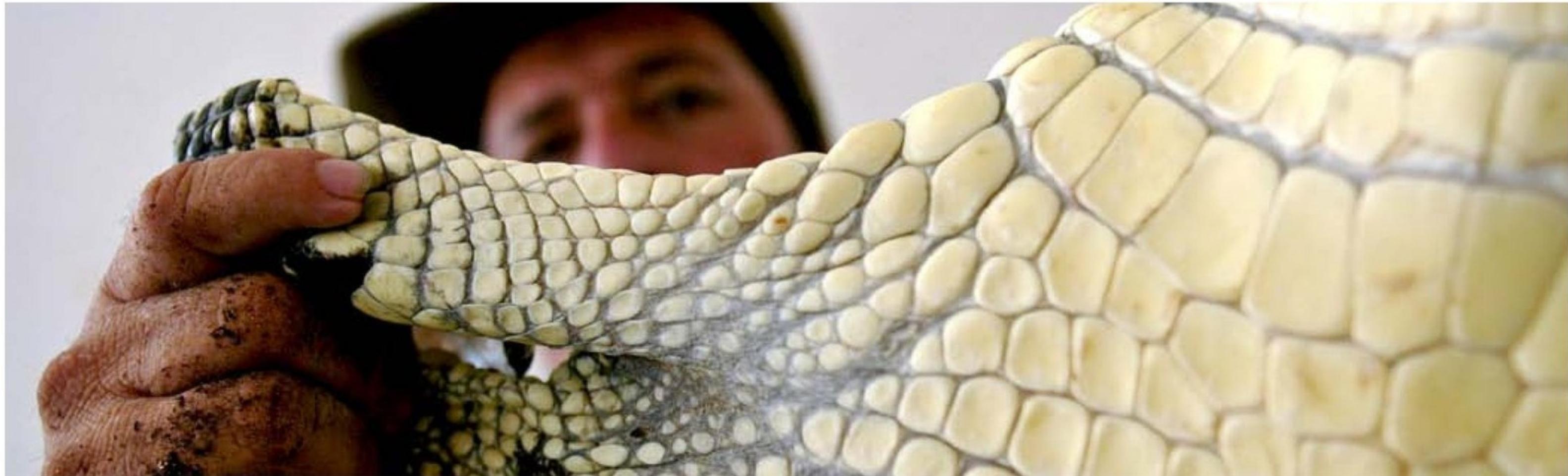
A crocodile eats a frog for lunch.

Crocodilians are very fierce fighters. When a crocodilian attacks, it is almost impossible to escape. But they have their enemies, too. They may be killed in a fight with a leopard or lion.



Crocodilians lay eggs on land.

Some crocodilians lay their eggs in sand. Others make a nest with soil and plants. Newly hatched babies are mostly helpless. Many get eaten by other animals. The lucky ones have Mom to protect them after they hatch. Babies grow quickly. They are adults by the time they are 5 to 8 years old.



Crocodilian skin

Most crocodilians are endangered. In many parts of the world, people kill crocodilians for food and for their skins. Farmers destroy their homes to create land for growing crops and grazing animals. Crocodilians are also captured for use in wildlife parks. They are often killed when they grow too big.



A baby crocodilian gets special care.

Around the world, people are helping to protect crocodilians. They put eggs in incubators to keep them safe. People then care for the babies until they grow strong enough to survive in the wild. Protecting them helps to keep nature in balance.

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