

# AMERICAN CROCODILE

*Crocodylus acutus*

American crocodiles are primitive-looking reptiles native to the United States, Mexico, Central America, northern South America, and a number of islands in the Caribbean. This species of crocodile (there are 23 species of crocodylians around the world) primarily inhabits mangrove swamps, brackish creeks, and coastal canals. In the U.S., crocodiles only occur in salt and brackish water habitats in the southern tip of the Florida mainland and around the Florida Keys. American crocodiles are often confused with American alligators; both species

can occur in the same habitats in South Florida, so differentiation between the two may be necessary. Fortunately, there are some noticeable differences between the two species. Crocodiles have longer, thinner snouts than alligators. Alligators are dark gray or black as adults, whereas crocodiles are a light gray or tan. Also, if you observe a basking animal and wonder which species it is, check out the teeth (from a distance, of course!). Crocodiles have a very noticeable tooth (the 4th tooth on each side of the lower jaw) that is visible even when the mouth is closed. The lower 4th tooth of alligators is not visible because they are hidden in grooves in the jaw.

Although crocodiles over 20 feet long have been recorded in Central and South America, individuals reaching 12-13 feet long in the U.S. are considered very large. Crocodiles are accomplished predators that feed on fish, crabs, birds, and small mammals. “Croc” pose no real danger to humans unless provoked or molested; they should only be observed from a distance, and never be approached or fed. Female American “croc” lay 20 - 70 eggs in either a hole or a mound nest. They do not guard the nest as aggressively as alligators but may stay near the nest until the babies hatch up to 100 days later. The mother “croc” may even dig out the hatchlings and carry them to the water in her mouth. The hatchlings face many predator species like raccoons, birds, fish, and other crocodiles — most are eaten before they reach adult size. American crocodiles are endangered in all parts of their range. Habitat destruction and overcollecting for the skin trade have reduced the number of crocodiles. Unlike American alligators, which have made a comeback in much of their range, crocodiles have not fared as well. Careful management of habitat, scientific research, and public education are essential if we want these magnificent animals to survive.

**Baby  
crocodiles!**



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