

Crocodylia





Discussion Questions:

- 1) What animals belong to the crocodylia group?***
- 2) What types of environments do they inhabit?***
- 3) How do you tell the difference between crocodylia species ?***

Crocodile

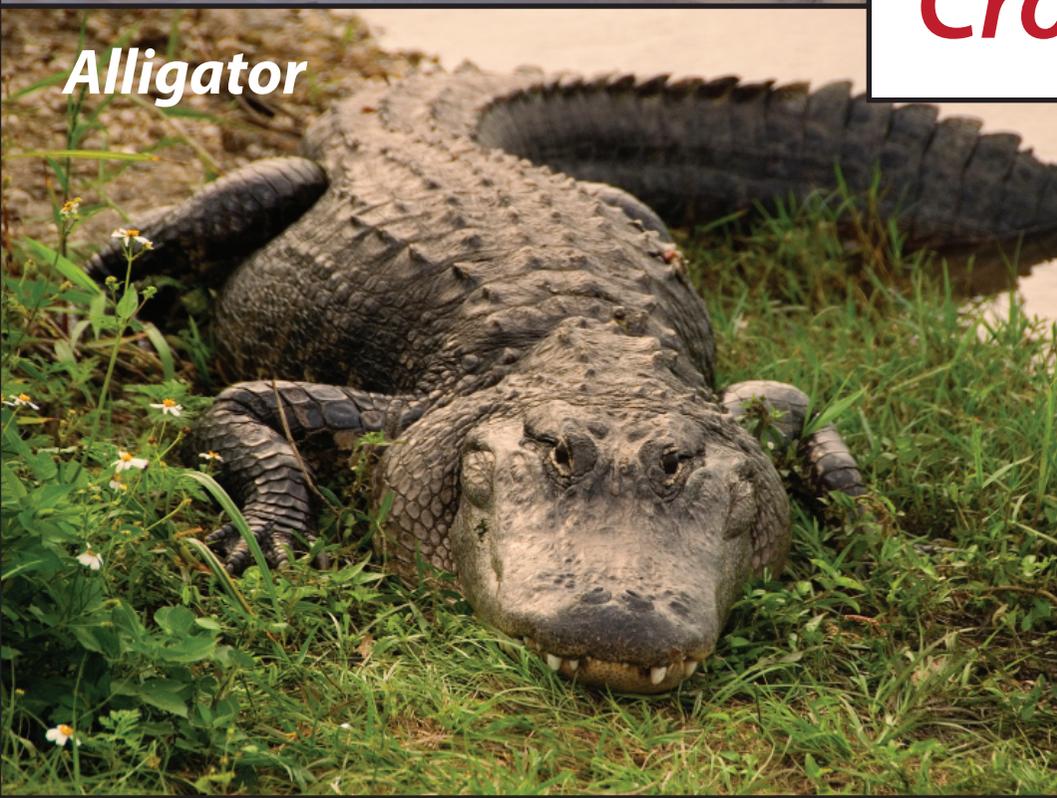


Caiman



Crocodylia

Alligator



Gharial (Gavial)



Crocodiles

The name crocodile comes from the Ancient Greek word 'crocodilos' meaning 'lizard'.

There are 14 different species of crocodile in the world today. They inhabit warm, tropical environments and can be found throughout Asia, Africa and Central America.

The largest species of crocodile is the esturine crocodile. These crocodiles inhabit South East Asia and Australia. An adult male can grow to an average size of 5 m (17ft). Some have been known to reach 6-7 m (20-23 ft). These are the most aggressive species of crocodile.

The Nile crocodile is the second largest species of crocodile. It generally does not inhabit salt water environments and can be found in lakes, rivers and marshlands of the central and eastern parts of the African continent.

The smallest crocodile species is the dwarf crocodile, which grows to an average length of around 1.5 m (4.9 ft). This species is found in the subtropical regions of western and central Africa.



Esturine (salt water) crocodile



Dwarf Crocodile

Caiman

There are 6 species of caiman living in the world today. They can be found in warm climates in parts of Central and South America, including the Amazon rainforest.

Caimans get their name from the spanish word for alligator. Caimans and alligators are related.

The Black Caiman inhabits the Amazon Basin and is the largest predator in the rainforest ecosystem. Though the females are smaller, male caimans can reach a length of about 5 m (17 ft).

The Spectacled Caiman inhabits lowland wetland regions of Central and South America. These animals are smaller, with males reaching 1.8-2 m (5.9-6.6 ft). They get their name from the ridges around their eyes that make them look like they are wearing a pair of spectacles!



Spectacled Caiman



Black Caiman

Alligator

There are 2 species of alligator living in the world today:

i) The American Alligator, which inhabits the south-eastern states of the USA, including Florida, Louisiana, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, Mississippi and Texas.

ii) The Chinese Alligator, which inhabits subtropical temperate regions of east China.

Alligators have a rounded, u-shape snout. The upper jaw is wider than the lower jaw and tends to overlap it, hiding the teeth of the lower jaw.

Chinese Alligator



American Alligator



Gharial (Gavial)

The Gharial, or gavial as it is sometimes known, inhabits the river systems of Northern India and Bangladesh. They get their name from the bulbous pot-shape that develops on the end of their snout, after the Hindi word ghara, meaning 'mud pot'.

Male gharials reach an average length of about 3.9 m (13 ft) but older gharials have been known to reach 6 m (20 ft).



A gharial's long thin snout with razor sharp interlocking teeth is well adapted to catching fish, which is its primary food source.

The population of gharials has steadily declined in recent decades due to habitat loss and a reduction in food sources due to over-fishing. The species is currently endangered.

How do you tell the difference between a crocodile and an alligator?

Crocodiles have a v-shaped snout, while alligators and caimans have u-shaped snouts.

Alligators and caimans have a larger upper jaw that overlaps the lower jaw. This means that only their top teeth show when their mouths are closed.

When a crocodile's mouth is closed, its long top and bottom teeth show, as well as smaller interlocking top and bottom teeth.

