

Crocodiles and Alligators

Crocodiles and alligators belong to a group of reptiles called crocodylians. These fierce carnivores (meat-eating animals) have not changed much for millions of years. Today, there are 14 different types of crocodile, 2 types of alligator and 6 types of caiman.



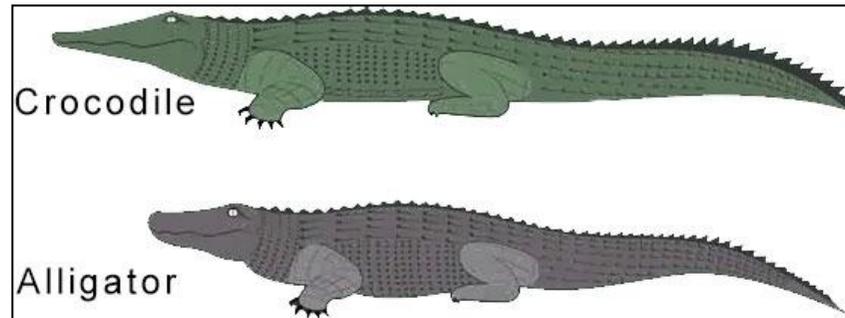
Crocodile grazing in the sun.

Did you know...

- When baby crocodiles hatch out of their eggs, they call out for their mother.
- Crocodiles and alligators have thick, scaly skin which protects them from being attacked.
- You can tell crocodiles and alligators apart by their teeth. When an alligator shuts its mouth you can't see any teeth in its bottom jaw. When a crocodile closes its mouth you can see the fourth tooth on each side of its bottom jaw.

How do crocodiles care for their young?

Crocodiles make much better parents than many other reptiles. A female Nile crocodile lays up to 75 eggs, she buries them under than sand in the riverbank. She guards them for about 3 months until they hatch, and then carries them gently in her big mouth down to the water. She goes on protecting them from predators (animals that would want to eat them) for another few weeks, before leaving them to fight their own battles.



The main differences between a crocodile and alligator, in addition to their teeth, are the shape of the nose and tail.

How fast are alligators?

Alligators, such as the American alligator, can run fast on land, but they are even quicker in water. To swim, they tuck their legs under their bodies and swish their strong tails from side to side, powering themselves through the water.

The American alligator lives in south-eastern USA, in warm rivers and swamps. It will eat almost anything it can catch, including water birds, fish and turtles. In busy areas, the American alligator will sometimes attack farm animals that get too close to the water.