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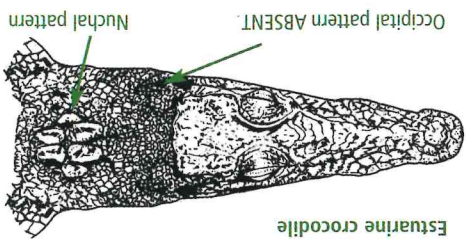
Two species of crocodile occur in Western Australia: the estuarine (or saltwater) crocodile and the freshwater crocodile. Both species are found extensively throughout northern Australia, with the estuarine crocodile extending in the east as far as Townsville in Queensland. In Western Australia, known crocodile habitat extends south to Exmouth, with occasional records further south to Carnarvon.

Crocodiles in Western Australia

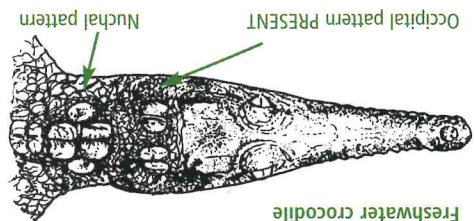


Estuarine crocodiles (commonly known as 'salties') are most likely to be encountered in tidal rivers and estuaries, billabongs and on the floodplains of the Kimberley. They can also be found in the open sea. Despite what the name suggests, estuarine crocodiles are not found exclusively in saltwater. They are also commonly found in freshwater pools and rivers many kilometres inland. The estuarine crocodile is the largest of all crocodile species. It has been known to grow up to seven metres and is considered to be a dangerous predator. This crocodile has a varied diet but it feeds mainly on fish, waterbirds and occasionally large land mammals, such as wallabies. Their large size, broad snout and arrangement of bony scales on the top of their head and neck allows relatively easy identification in the wild (see diagram below).

'Salties' can be dangerous to humans.



Estuarine crocodile



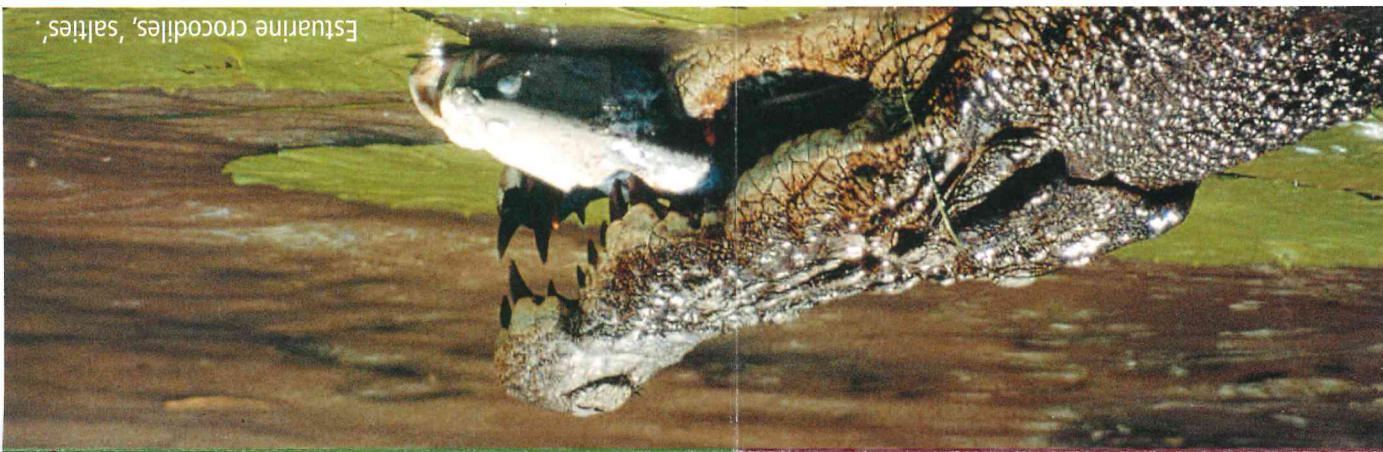
Freshwater crocodile

Compared to the estuarine crocodile, 'freshies' are relatively small, are rarely longer than three metres and are not considered as aggressive. Their relatively small size and narrow snout distinguish them from estuarine crocodiles, as well as the pattern of bony scales on their head and neck (see diagram below).

As the name suggests, freshwater crocodiles (commonly known as 'freshies') inhabit freshwater rivers, creeks, artificial lakes (such as lakes Argyle and Kununurra) and occasionally tidal areas. They feed mainly on insects, small aquatic animals and fish.

Freshwater crocodile (*Crocodylus johnstoni*)

Estuarine crocodile (*Crocodylus porosus*)



Estuarine crocodiles, 'salties'

How to be 'crocodile wise'

- Seek expert advice about crocodiles before swimming, camping, fishing or boating. There is potential danger anywhere within the estuarine crocodile range. If in doubt, do not swim, canoe or use small boats in estuaries, tidal rivers or deep pools. Estuarine crocodiles may also inhabit freshwater pools and billabongs a great distance upstream. People visiting the area should be aware that some of these billabongs and pools may not be connected to the main watercourse during the dry season from April to September.
- Large estuarine crocodiles have no fear of humans; they are often inquisitive and may swim towards boats. Leave the area immediately if you see one.
- Be aware – keep your eyes open for crocodiles. Children and pets are at particular risk in the water or at the water's edge.
- Do not paddle, clean fish, prepare food or camp at the water's edge. Fill a bucket and do your chores at least 50 metres away.
- Returning daily or regularly to the same spot at the water's edge is dangerous.
- Stand a few metres back from the water's edge when fishing.
- Do not lean over the edge of a boat or stand on logs overhanging water, and do not hang articles over the edge of boats – this includes arms and legs!
- Dispose of food scraps, fish offal and other waste properly and away from your camp site.
- It is common to see crocodiles near boat ramps so be especially vigilant when launching or retrieving your boat in estuarine crocodile habitat.

Do not feed crocodiles!



Feeding crocodiles is a foolhardy practice that takes away their natural fear of humans and teaches crocodiles to recognise us as a source of food. Estuarine crocodiles mostly remain near the water's edge and may be attracted to a struggling fish or a person splashing in the water. Fish and fishing lures are replaceable – human life is not.

For more information on crocodiles:

Department of Environment and Conservation

East Kimberley Regional Office

Lot 248 Ivanhoe Road / PO Box 942 Kununurra 6743
Ph (08) 9168 4200 Fax (08) 9168 2179
Email kununurra@dpaw.wa.gov.au

West Kimberley District Office

111 Herbert Street / PO Box 65 Broome 6725
Ph (08) 9195 5500 Fax (08) 9193 5027
Email broome@dpaw.wa.gov.au

Pilbara Regional Office

Lot 3 Mardie and Anderson roads
/ PO Box 835 Karratha 6714
Ph (08) 9143 1488 Fax (08) 9144 1118

Visit DPaw on the internet at www.dpaw.wa.gov.au



Department of
Parks and Wildlife



Crocodiles



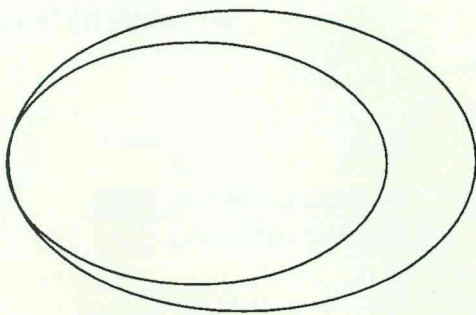
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Biology

Crocodiles have been on Earth for more than 200 million years. They are an ancient group of reptiles with ancestors around before the age of the dinosaurs. They lived through the Cretaceous period and successfully survived the great ice age periods of the past two million years. Perfectly adapted to their environment, today's crocodiles differ very little from their ancient relatives.



Freshwater crocodile egg - 70mm
Estuarine crocodile egg - 85mm



Nesting

The estuarine crocodile usually nests during the northern wet season from November to April while the freshwater crocodile lays its eggs in late August or early September. The females construct nests in which eggs are laid and incubated.

Both species are territorial and will defend their nests against intruders. The females construct nests in which hard-shelled eggs are laid and incubated. Estuarine crocodiles construct a vegetation and soil nest in which up to 50 eggs are laid. Freshwater crocodiles excavate a hole in sand or other soft soil and lay between 13 and 15 eggs. The incubation period is three months for both species.

Many factors affect the survival rate of young crocodiles; only a few ever reach maturity. Floodwaters may inundate and drown eggs and young crocodiles are often taken as food by birds of prey, goannas and dingoes.



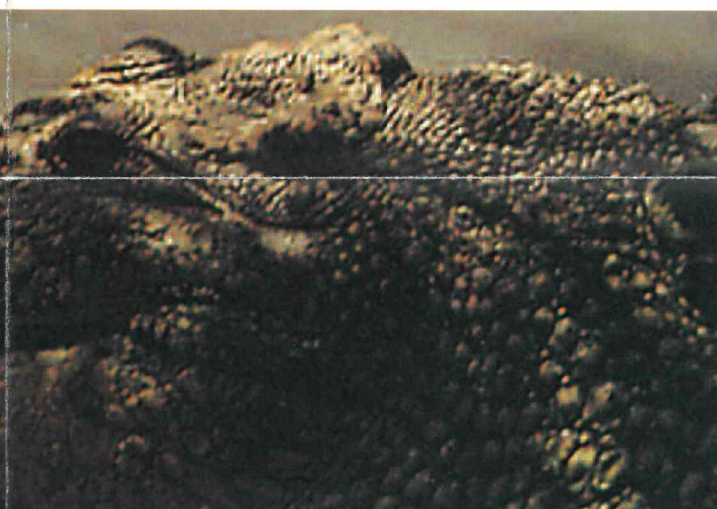
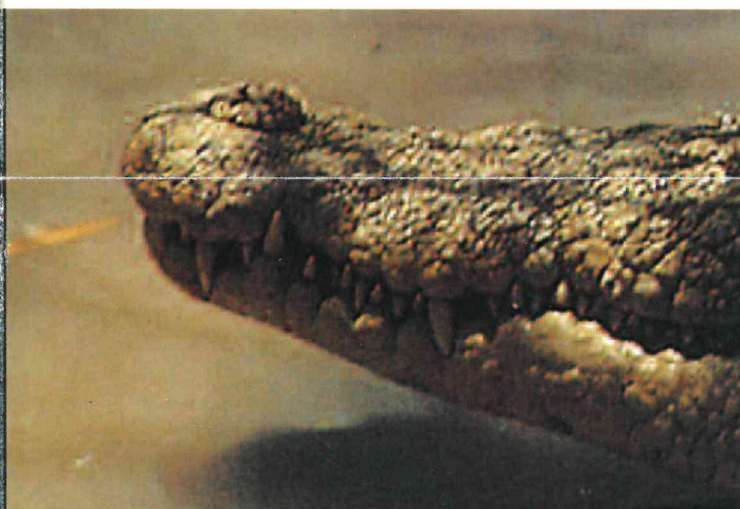
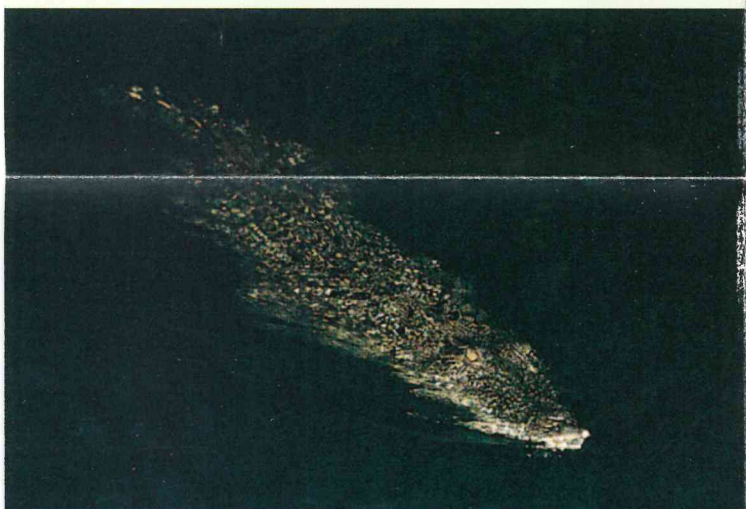
Conservation

Hunting for skins after 1945 caused a drastic decline in the crocodile population. In 1962, freshwater crocodiles were given protection from hunting in Western Australia and in 1970 protection was given to the estuarine crocodile. Both species are now well on the way to recovery.

Crocodile farms in Western Australia take crocodiles from the wild under licences based on the guidelines of DPaW's Crocodile Management Program. This program helps ensure the survival of crocodiles and maintains their role in the ecosystems in which they occur.

Protection

The two species of crocodiles that occur in Australia are fully protected by state, national and international legislation. Poaching, killing or interfering with crocodiles, their eggs or habitat is an offence carrying penalties of up to \$10,000. Incidents should be reported to your local DPaW office.



Where can you see crocodiles?

Freshwater crocodiles are relatively common within their range. Western Australia probably has the largest population because of the wide range of suitable habitats, such as the massive Argyle and Kununurra lakes created by the Ord River dam system. 'Freshies' can be seen throughout the Kimberley in gorges and freshwater billabongs. Early morning and in the afternoon are the best times to see them as they bask in the sun or float in the shallows searching for food.

The estuarine crocodile can be difficult to observe in the wild, owing to its shy nature. However, in certain areas it is possible to see them basking on mud banks and swimming during the day. Do not approach these animals. 'Salties' can move with amazing speed and are generally much more territorial than their freshwater cousins.

Estuarine crocodiles are predators and when entering their habitat the individual takes all the responsibility for personal safety. Crocodiles always have the advantage, so observe them from a safe distance.

Crocodile warning!

Throughout the Kimberley region and parts of the Pilbara region you may see these signs erected on tracks and roads, or when entering known crocodile habitats. The signs may also be found near boat ramps and at access points to tidal-influenced waterways and rivers.

However, the absence of a warning sign does not signify that it is safe to swim or carry out other water-based recreation activities such as canoeing, fishing or boating.

When you enter the Kimberley or Pilbara regions, you are entering crocodile country. Seek advice from your local DPaW office and be crocodile wise in your behaviour.

Problem crocodiles

In Western Australia, problem crocodiles are considered to be those actively presenting themselves as a threat to humans. The decision as to what to do with such an animal is made on a case-by-case basis. When appropriate, problem animals are caught and relocated to one of the crocodile farms. Crocodiles generally cannot be relocated to another area due to their territorial nature. If released they will invariably return to where they were captured.

Very often, problem crocodiles are between one-and-a-half and three metres in length, a size category known to be very mobile. Most of them would have travelled long distances in search of safe territory before entering areas populated by humans.

