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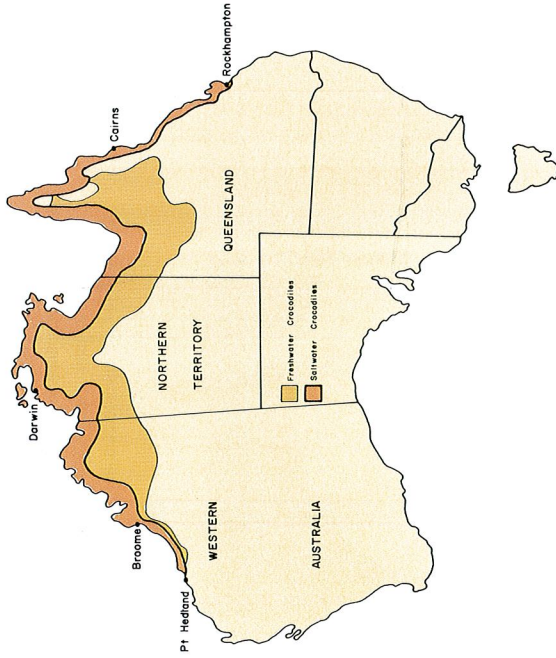
Department of Biodiversity,
Conservation and Attractions

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CROCODILES

CROCODILES IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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 south as Townsville in Queensland. In Western Australia, known crocodile habitat extends south to near Port Hedland.

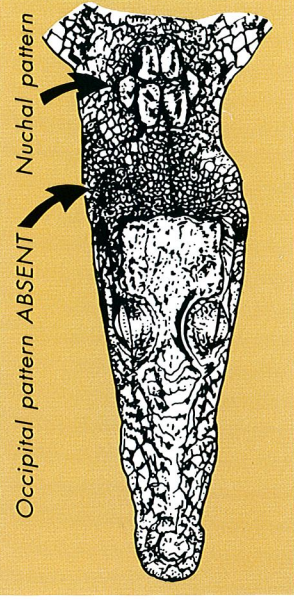


ESTUARINE CROCODILE (*Crocodylus porosus*)

Estuarine crocodiles (commonly known as 'salties') are most likely to be encountered in tidal rivers and billabongs on the floodplains of the Kimberley. They can also be found in the open sea.

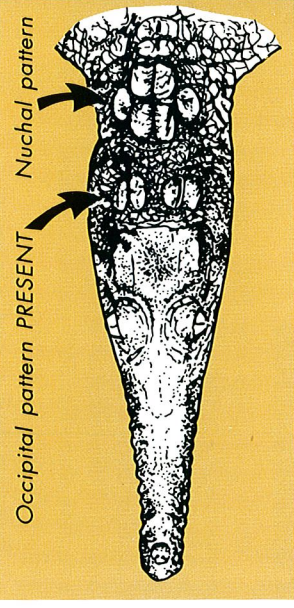
The estuarine crocodile is the largest living reptile. It has been known to grow up to seven metres in length and is considered to be a dangerous predator. This crocodile has a varied diet, but it feeds mainly on fish, waterbirds and, occasionally, large land mammals such as wallabies.

'Salties' can be dangerous to humans.



FRESHWATER CROCODILE (*Crocodylus johnstoni*)

As the name suggests, freshwater crocodiles (commonly known as 'freshies') inhabit freshwater rivers, creeks, artificial lakes (e.g. Lake Argyle) and, occasionally, tidal areas. They feed mainly on insects, small aquatic animals and fish. Compared with the estuarine crocodile, 'freshies' are relatively small, rarely exceeding three metres in length, and not as aggressive.



HOW TO BE 'CROCODILE WISE'

- Seek expert advice about crocodiles before swimming, camping, fishing or boating. There is potential danger anywhere in 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.
- Large estuarine crocodiles have no fear of humans; they are often inquisitive and will 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 with water 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 or legs!
- Dispose of food scraps, fish offal and other waste properly and away from your campsite.

Do not feed crocodiles!

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.

TAKE CARE IN CROCODILE COUNTRY!

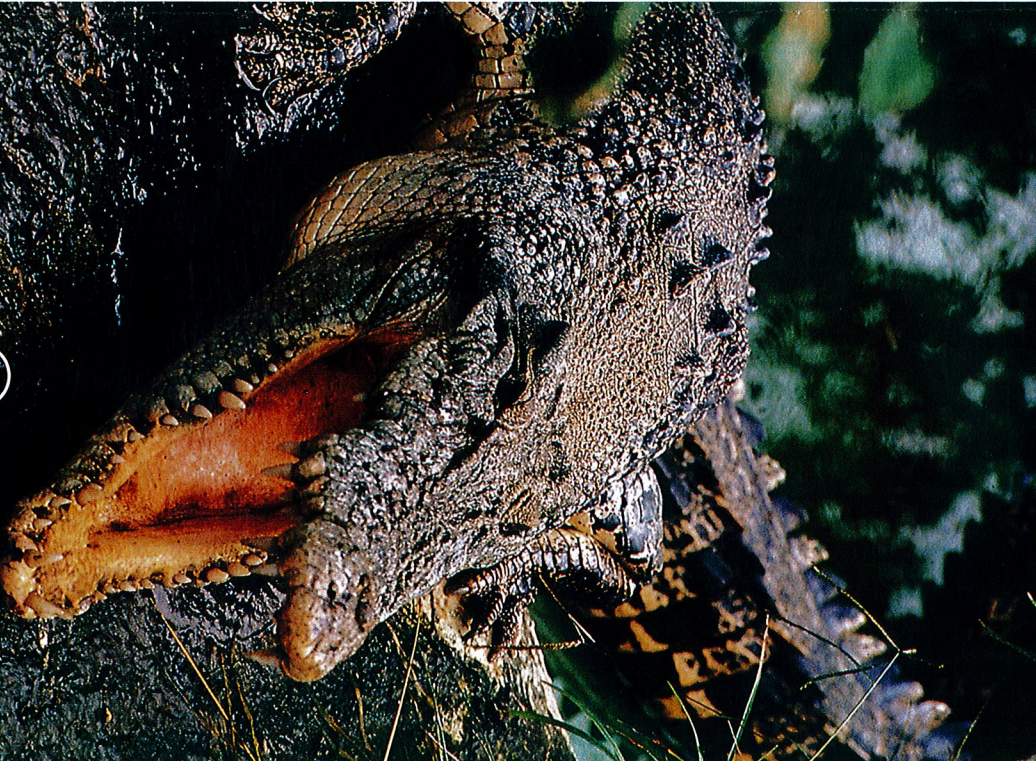


FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ON CROCODILES CONTACT:

DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND LAND MANAGEMENT

- **Kimberley Regional Office**
PO Box 942, Kununurra
Western Australia 6743
Telephone (091) 68 0200
- **Kimberley District Office**
PO Box 65, Broome
Western Australia 6725
Telephone (091) 92 1036
- **Pilbara Regional Office**
PO Box 835, Karratha
Western Australia 6714
Telephone (091) 86 8288

Photographs by R. Gueho, R. Vaughan, G. Webb Pty. Ltd and T. Forde.



DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND LAND MANAGEMENT

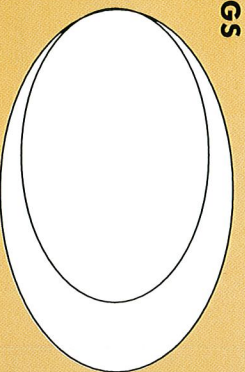


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BIOLOGY

Crocodiles have been present on Earth for more than 200 million years. They are a very ancient group whose ancestors were around before the age of the dinosaurs. They lived through the Cretaceous era and successfully survived the great ice age periods of the past two million years. Today's crocodiles differ very little from their ancient relatives. They are perfectly adapted to their environment.

EGGS



NESTING

The estuarine crocodile usually nests during the northern 'wet' season from November to April, whereas the freshwater crocodile lays its eggs in late August or early September. 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 of about three months is similar for both species.

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

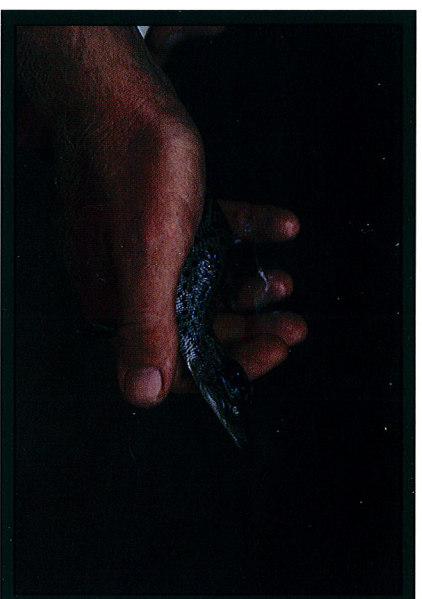


WHERE CAN YOU SEE CROCODILES?

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 Lakes Argyle and Kununurra that were created by the damming of the Ord River 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 closely. '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 responsibilities 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 major highways 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 Pilbara and Kimberley regions, you are entering crocodile country. Seek local advice from your nearest CALM office and be crocodile wise in your behaviour.

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 (the first Australian state to do so), and in 1970 protection was given to the estuarine crocodile. Both species are now well on the way to recovery.

There are three crocodile farms in Western Australia that take crocodiles from the wild under the guidelines of CALM's crocodile management program.

This program helps ensure the survival of crocodiles and maintains their role in the ecosystems in which they occur, in a manner unlikely to cause irreversible changes to the species themselves or their habitats.

PROTECTION

The two species of crocodile that occur in Australia are fully protected by national and international legislation. Poaching, killing or interfering with crocodiles, their eggs or habitat is an offence. Incidents should be reported to your local CALM office.

Top: Less than one per cent of hatching crocodiles survive to adulthood.

Middle: The temperature of the nest determines the gender of young crocodiles.

Left: Nests are made from vegetation scratched into a mound. The eggs are incubated for about three months.



'PROBLEM' CROCODILES

In Western Australia, problem crocodiles are defined as those within or near settled areas or areas of human use (e.g. for recreation) that present a threat to humans, and/or are attacking livestock. 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.

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.

Above left: Large estuarine crocodiles show little fear and can be very curious about small boats.

Above middle and back page: Warning signs are placed at popular recreation sites and boat ramps.

Above: Rope traps are designed to capture large, wary estuarine crocodiles causing problems near communities.