

American crocodile

Crocodylus acutus



(Photo by FWC)

Taxonomic Classification

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata

Class: Reptilia

Order: Crocodylia

Family: Crocodylidae

Genus/Species: *Crocodylus acutus*

Common Name: American crocodile

Listing Status

Federal Status: Threatened

FL Status: Federally-designated Threatened

FNAI Ranks: G2/S1 (Globally: Imperiled/State: Critically Imperiled)

IUCN Status: VU (Vulnerable)

Physical Description

The American crocodile is a grayish-brown crocodylian that can reach lengths of up to 15 feet (4.6 meters). A dark crossband or spots can be found on the back, legs, and tail. The crocodile also has a white belly, tapered snout, and the fourth tooth on the lower jaw (mandible) can be seen when the snout is closed (Florida Natural Areas Inventory 2001).

Life History

The diet of the American crocodiles primarily consists of small mammals, birds, frogs, turtles, and fish (Fishman et al. 2009).

Male crocodiles begin courting females in late January and early February. Crocodiles are ectothermic and therefore control their body temperature by basking in the sun, or moving to areas with warmer or cooler air or water temperatures. Courting rituals can be extensive, often lasting for days. Males initiate courting by quickly and consecutively performing head slaps, and the female will raise her snout and arch her tail if she is interested. The last courting ritual involves the male and female rubbing snouts and submerging under water. Nesting occurs in late April and early May. The soil nests are built on land and above high tide marks. Females will lay 20 to 60 eggs that incubate for about 85 days. When the incubation period is complete, females will dig the nest up and carry the young to water (Mazzotti, n.d.).

Habitat & Distribution

The American crocodile inhabits brackish or saltwater areas and can be found in ponds, coves, and creeks in mangrove swamps. American crocodiles occur in South Florida and also can be found in Hispaniola, Cuba, Jamaica, along the Caribbean coast from southern Mexico to Venezuela, and along the Pacific coast from Mexico to Peru. The northern end of the crocodile's range is in South Florida. Occasionally, crocodiles are encountered inland in freshwater areas along the southern Florida coast (Distribution map data from: Krysko et al. 2011).



Threats

Historically crocodiles were hunted extensively as their hides were worth a considerable amount of money between 1930 and 1960. This caused considerable damage to their population rates. Presently, illegal hunting and habitat destruction are the main threats to the crocodile population (Florida Museum of Natural History, n.d.). Habitat destruction occurs in different ways, but the main threat has been humans developing in crocodile habitat. It is illegal to hunt crocodiles in the U.S.; however, some hunting still occurs illegally. Hunting also occurs in other countries in the crocodile's range, as most countries have hard times enforcing conservation laws, or have no conservation laws to protect the crocodile and its habitat. Hydrological alterations in their habitats can cause damage to their eggs as they cannot withstand conditions that are too dry or too wet (Florida Museum of Natural History, n.d.). Crocodile nests also face threats of predation from raccoons, birds, and crabs (Mazzotti, n.d). Other threats include vehicle strikes, disease, and mortality and habitat damage from hurricanes (Florida Natural Areas Inventory 2001).

Conservation & Management

The American crocodile is protected as a Threatened species by the Federal Endangered Species Act and as a Federally-designated Threatened species by [Florida's Endangered and Threatened Species Rule](#).

[-Federal Recovery Plan](#)

Other Informative Links

[Animal Diversity Web](#)
[Florida Museum of Natural History](#)
[Florida Natural Areas Inventory](#)
[FWC - American Crocodile brochure](#)
[FWC - A Guide to Living with Crocodiles](#)
[International Union for Conservation of Nature](#)
[National Geographic](#)
[University of Florida IFAS Extension](#)
[U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Species Profile](#)
[Western Connecticut State University](#)

References

- Fishman, J., K. MacKinnon and S. Baker. 2009. "Crocodylus acutus" (On-line), Animal Diversity Web. Accessed June 01, 2011
http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/site/accounts/information/Crocodylus_acutus.html.
- Florida Museum of Natural History. (n.d.). *American Crocodile*. Retrieved May 20, 2011, from Herpetology: http://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/cnhc/csp_cacu.htm.
- Florida Natural Areas Inventory. 2001. Field guide to the rare animals of Florida.
http://www.fnai.org/FieldGuide/pdf/Crocodylus_acutus.PDF.
- Krysko, K., K. Enge, and P. Moler. 2011. *Crocodylus acutus* (Cuvier 1807) American crocodile. Atlas of Amphibians and Reptiles in Florida.
- Mazzotti, F. J. (n.d.). *American Crocodiles (Crocodylus acutus) in Florida*. Retrieved May 20, 2011, from Institute of Food and Agriculture Sciences:
<http://myfwc.com/media/664081/AmericanCrocodilesinFL.pdf>.