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Australia Zoo
Home of The Crocodile Hunter

Amazing Animals
Fact sheets

Crocodilians

The Crocodilian family includes, Crocodiles, Alligators, Caimans and Gharials. Australia Zoo is home to three of these species - Saltwater Crocodiles, Freshwater Crocodiles and American Alligators.

Learn More About Australia Zoo Crocodile Research

American Alligator

Crocodilians are grouped into one of three families. Crocodylidae, Alligatoridae and Gavialidae. The American Alligator belongs to the sub family Alligatorinae which includes five species of caiman and one other alligator, the Chinese alligator. American alligators are a fairly large species with the males reaching sizes of 4 and 4.5m in length.
Alligators are generally a very docile species, especially in captivity. They are capable of killing humans but attacks are very rare and usually unlucky. Adult alligators are usually uniform black in coloration and have a very flat rounded snout. Their eyes sit high on their head and their ears are a slit behind their eyes. They have large teeth that are surprisingly blunt, designed for puncturing rather than chewing.

Habitat

Found only in the United States of America, the American alligator occupies all aquatic habitats. Their range stretches along the South East of America from Florida to Louisiana and along the Mississippi River to Texas. They may be found in both natural and man-made freshwater lakes, ponds, rivers, and wetland areas. Alligators will also dig caves in the riverbanks to maintain a wallow during the dry season.

Diet

The diet of the alligator depends on the size of the animal. While alligators are very young their diet consists mostly of insects that have fallen into the water. As their reactions develop they will start to hunt small fish and shrimps as well. As the alligator grows the prey they target also becomes larger. During their juvenile years they will eat crayfish, fish, mice, rats, reptiles, birds and other small mammals. Mature alligators are large enough to eat animals like cows and deer.

Breeding

The American Alligator is probably surviving better in the wild than any other Crocodillian. They will inhabit any fresh water system they can find, even ponds in the middle of housing estates and can very occasionally be seen in the ocean. However, as they do not possess salt glands alligators must return to fresh water regularly to rid their system of salt and to drink.
When it comes to breeding alligators are proving to be very successful. The female scratches up a large mound of compost in which she deposits about 30 to 50 eggs depending on her size. The eggs will take about 65 to 85 days to incubate and an interesting fact is the temperature inside the nest will determine the sex of the offspring.

Australia Zoo American Alligator profiles

Hank

Hank is an American Alligator who was born here at Australia Zoo in February 2006. He is the biggest of the bunch and by the time he is an adult he will be weighing in at over 250kg so he has some growing to do! Hank and his brothers bask together on the lawn around their pond, just waiting for a keeper to bring them a tasty morsel or two.

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