



Crocodile facts

The saltwater crocodile is the largest living reptile species. It can grow up to six metres and is a serious threat to humans. Saltwater crocodiles have evolved special characteristics that make them excellent predators.

- Large saltwater crocodiles can stay underwater for at least one hour because they can reduce their heart rate to 2-3 beats per minute. This means that crocodiles can wait underwater until they see prey, or if people are using the same spot regularly, the crocodile can wait underwater until someone approaches the water's edge.
- A crocodile can float with only eyes and nostrils exposed, enabling it to approach prey without being detected.
- When under water, a special transparent eyelid protects the crocodile's eye. This means that crocodiles can still see when they are completely submerged.
- The tail of a crocodile is solid muscle and a major source of power, making it a strong swimmer and able to make sudden lunges out of the water to capture prey. These strong muscles also mean that for short bursts of time crocodiles can move faster than humans can on land.
- Crocodiles have a thin layer of guanine crystals behind their retina. This intensifies images, allowing crocodiles to see better at low light levels.
- Crocodiles have a 'minimum exposure' posture in the water, which means that only their sensory organs of eyes, cranial platform, ears and nostrils remain out of the water. This means that they often go unseen by prey, but if they are observed, the prey is often not able to tell how big the crocodile is.
- Crocodile eyes are located very closely together and they are oriented forward. This enables them to judge distance very accurately so they can determine the exact location of their prey prior to attack.
- Crocodiles have excellent hearing, which helps them to locate prey particularly in poor light or low visibility conditions.
- While crocodiles may regularly lose teeth, they have a second tooth sitting in reserve underneath the external tooth, which can replace the lost tooth.
- The jaws of crocodiles are designed to generate enormous power when the jaws are closing. This enables them to quickly crush prey.

Why does the Northern Territory have more crocodiles than Queensland or Western Australia?

A large proportion of the coastal region of the Northern Territory is an ideal habitat for saltwater crocodiles, particularly the big, productive "coastal" wetlands and rivers. Much of the Queensland coastline is in the cooler, more southerly latitudes, which is less optimal habitat for crocodiles. Much of the habitat on the east coast has also been significantly altered and fragmented by human settlement. Western Australia has saltwater crocodile habitat around the Kimberley coastline but this area is not as rich in mangroves and wetlands as the Territory coastline.

In the southern part of its range, winter temperatures reach a threshold below which crocodile eggs will not hatch and the longer cold periods significantly lower crocodile growth rates. The effect of a cooler climate on crocodiles can be seen in those animals kept in wildlife parks in southern Queensland. The crocodiles do not feed over winter as they cannot absorb enough warmth to digest food.

For further information visit www.nt.gov.au/becrocwise