

# Be Crocwise

## What you need to know!



**Be aware. It must be assumed that any body of water in the Top End may contain dangerous crocodiles.**

**Many waterways that are isolated in the dry season (May to September) are connected to other systems during wet season flooding (October to April), allowing crocodiles to move around over a large area. Read and obey all warning signs. If a waterway is not designated as 'open for swimming', then it may be inhabited by crocodiles.**

Crocodiles are a common and dominant predator in the tropical regions of Australia. Both the Saltwater Crocodile *Crocodylus porosus* and the Freshwater Crocodile *Crocodylus johnstoni* are protected species, contributing to our environment and economy in many ways.

Crocodiles are a strong drawcard for thousands of people who visit the Top End every year. In this way crocodiles play a part in supporting the many goods and service industries in the Territory which rely on tourism.

Although protected in the wild, crocodiles are farmed in the Top End and provide employment for hundreds of Territorians in the farms, tanneries and support businesses. The Top End's farms produce high quality crocodile skins and meat for Australian and overseas markets which are worth millions of dollars each year.



The industry relies on the wild population of crocodiles to supplement its captive stocks. This involves harvesting up to 50,000 crocodile eggs from the wild each wet season.

The Northern Territory's Crocodile Management Program, together with similar programs in Western Australia and Queensland, has made northern Australia one of the last strongholds of the Saltwater Crocodile, the world's largest crocodile. The Freshwater Crocodile is found only in Australia.

**Freshwater Crocodiles** - or 'Freshies', have also been known to bite, but they are timid and will usually only attack people when they are forced to defend themselves, for example, if you were to accidentally tread on one.

While 'Freshies' do not grow to more than 3.5 - 4 metres, the main visual difference between this species and 'Salties' is the shape of the snout. 'Freshies' have a long tapered snout, while 'Salties' have a broad snout.

**Saltwater Crocodiles** - are found in the coastal and tidal areas of rivers, lagoons, billabongs, floodplains and freshwater reaches of rivers. In fact, they can be found in any waterway, waterbody or low lying area, right across northern Australia.

Saltwater Crocodiles, or 'Salties', can grow to about six metres in length, while some larger individual animals have been reported. The size of the animal enables it to be a predator on animals such as cattle and

horses while unwary people can also put themselves at risk.

Hunting of both species in the 1940's to 60's saw a great reduction in the crocodile population in the NT.

The hunting of 'Freshies' stopped in 1964 and 'Salties' in 1971, when they were declared protected species under federal law.

Crocodile populations have increased from an estimated six or seven thousand animals in the early 1970's, and are now in excess of 75,000 in 2009.

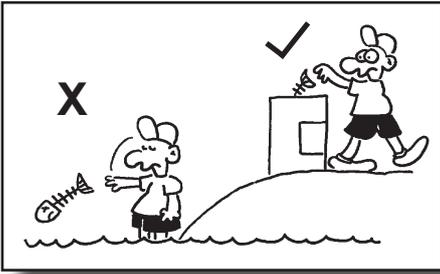
Management programs for crocodiles include measures to conserve the species across the Top End, while also removing animals from populated areas where they may pose a risk to people.

Permanent crocodile traps are maintained by the Parks and Wildlife Service in Darwin Harbour, from which over 200 animals are removed each year. Traps are also maintained in the Katherine River near Katherine, the McArthur River near Boorooloola, the Victoria River near Timber Creek, the Roper River near Ngukurr and around Nhulunbuy and Alyangula. However this does not ensure that areas are safe for swimming.

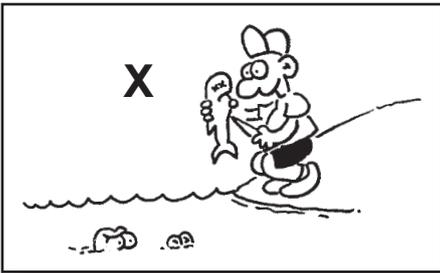
- **Crocodiles are Common**
- **Crocodiles Move Around**
- **Crocodiles are Deadly**
- **Read and Obey All Signs**
- **Be Crocwise!**

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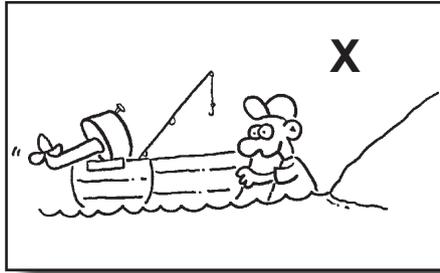
It's easy to enjoy the Top End's waterways in safety. Just follow these tips.



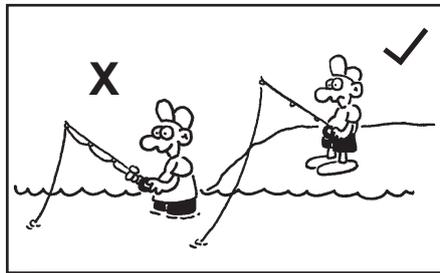
Place fish carcasses in bins provided or bury them well away from the water's edge.



Clean fish well away from the waters edge.



Avoid entering the water when launching a boat.



Maintain a safe distance from the water when fishing.

## Did you know . . . .

- Saltwater Crocodiles can live for more than 70 years, and Freshwater Crocodiles are thought to live for at least 50 years.
- Although ungainly, crocodiles can walk on land at a speed of about 1-2 km/hr. Short bursts of speed on land rarely exceed 10 km/hr, and tire the animal quickly. Freshwater Crocodiles can reach speeds of up to 18 km/hr.
- Large crocodiles can stay underwater for at least an hour by dropping their heart rate to 2-3 beats per minute to conserve energy.
- Although commonly referred to as 'cold-blooded', crocodiles need heat to function and prefer a body temperature of 30-33° C. Unlike mammals which generate their own heat, crocodiles rely on the sun to warm them.
- 50-70% of the food which a crocodile eats is converted to flesh and energy. In humans it is about 3-4% because so much (80%) is used to produce heat.

This means that crocodiles can survive for months without eating.

- A female saltwater crocodile lays her eggs in a nest of vegetation. The sex of her offspring is determined by the temperature at which the eggs are incubated. If the nest is below 30° C exclusively females are produced, at 31° C a mix results, and 32-33° C gives mostly males.
- The skin on crocodiles is composed of a network of interconnected scales or scutes of various types and sizes. On the belly surfaces, these scales tend to be square and flat; it is the skin of this region that is most commonly used in the leather industry. The scales on the flanks and the neck tend to be round with a raised centre, while along the back and upper surfaces of the tail, the scales are raised in a very pronounced way. These raised scales (osteoderms) are provided with a rich blood supply that transports heat back into the body when crocodiles bask.

- A crocodile can float with only eyes and nostrils exposed, enabling it to approach prey without being detected.
- Underwater, a special transparent eyelid crosses the eye for protection. Their eyes function best in low light. The pupils of the eye which are reduced to a slit in daylight, open wide and a special layer of light reflecting crystals behind the retina, common in nocturnal animals, enhances night vision. These crystals cause the eyes to shine red when caught in torch or spot light.
- The tail of a crocodile is solid muscle and a major source of power, making it a strong swimmer and enabling it to make sudden lunges out of the water to capture prey.
- Some crocodiles swallow hard items such as stones to assist in digestion and possibly also to help balance the animal in the water.
- When opening its mouth, a crocodile can seal the back of its throat to avoid gulping water.
- Opening its mouth while basking in the sun prevents a crocodile's brain overheating while its body continues to absorb heat.
- The jaws are extremely powerful and a large crocodile can crush the head of a pig with a single bite.
- Crocodiles have no vocal chords. Growls are made by snorting air through the back of the throat or nostrils.



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