



kakadu™

NATIONAL PARK

Crocodiles

Estuarine (saltwater) crocodiles are the world's largest reptiles and Australia's largest estuarine and freshwater predator. They use stillness and camouflage to hide and underwater stealth and lightening reflexes to kill.

The best way to safely see crocodiles is by going on a commercial boat cruise or from a high point, like Cahill's crossing viewing platform. The dry season is the best time to see them as they concentrate in shrinking water bodies.

Aboriginal people are familiar with the crocodiles on their land. Large crocodiles are respected while smaller crocodiles are sometimes eaten. Crocodile eggs are collected for food.

Young people are not allowed to eat crocodile intestines. These are reserved for the elderly, who fill them with crocodile fat and roast them.



1 Estuarine (saltwater) crocodile

2 Different crocodile management signs are used in the park. The brown and white signs are used near the escarpment where park rangers check some rock pools for estuarine (saltwater) crocodiles at the end of each wet season. These pools are closed until Rangers have completed surveys and are confident that there are no signs of estuarine (saltwater) crocodiles present. However, be aware that crocodiles can move into these areas undetected at any stage. Not all of the rock pools are checked by rangers for crocodiles. You enter the water at your own risk.

AN OLD BADMARDI MAN SPEAKS ABOUT CROCODILES

In the Creation Era, a man was killed by Ginga, the first crocodile, while he and his wife were hunting for turtle in an escarpment pool. The woman knew her husband was dead when she saw his floating intestines.

Ginga, the estuarine (saltwater) crocodile, went down to the lowlands to live in the rivers and waterholes of the floodplains, while Madjarri, the smaller freshwater crocodile, remained in the escarpment pools.

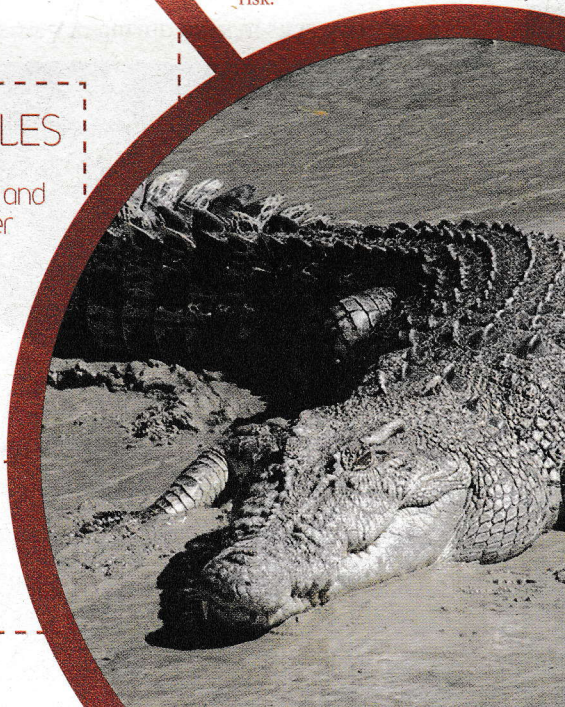
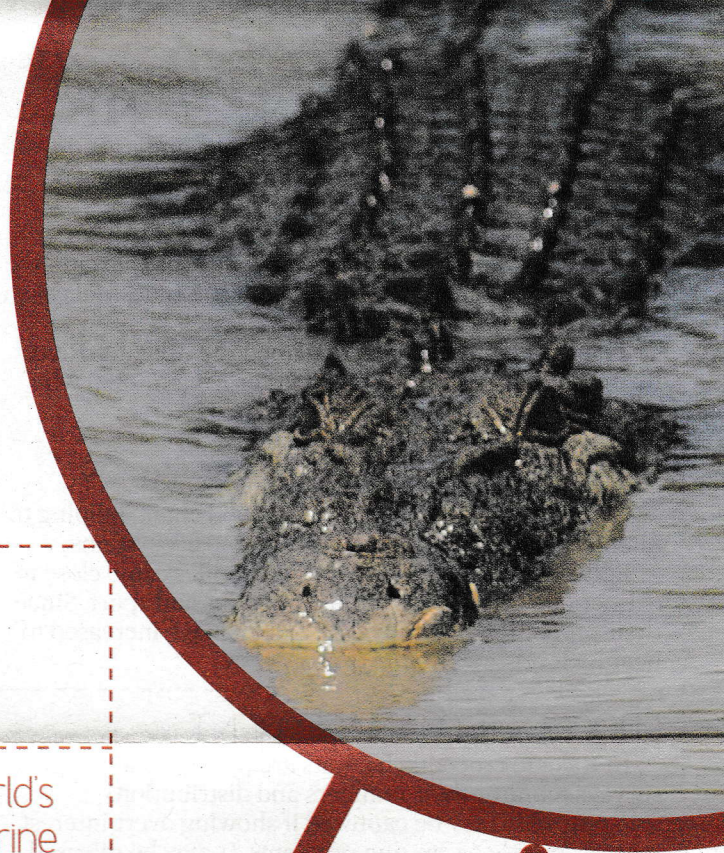
Today when crocodiles are cut open, their intestines resemble the skull of the man killed. Because both species of crocodile have intestines the same shape they are said to have a common ancestor.



Australian Government



PARK NOTE



WHERE CROCODILES ARE FOUND

Two crocodile species live in Australia and Kakadu, the estuarine (saltwater) crocodile, *Crocodylus porosus*, and freshwater crocodile, *Crocodylus johnstoni*.

Freshwater crocodiles are only found in northern Australia. Estuarine (saltwater) crocodiles are also in India, Southeast Asia and throughout the Indo-Malaysian Archipelago to Papua New Guinea.

The rivers in Kakadu were named the Alligator Rivers by the coastal explorer Phillip Parker King in 1820 who assumed the crocodiles he saw were alligators.

A CONSERVATION SUCCESS STORY

Crocodiles are a vital part of the food chain, helping to maintain the natural balance of wetland ecosystems.

Between the 1940s and 1960s crocodiles came close to extinction as they were hunted for skins and sport. Since their protection in 1971 their numbers have increased to healthy levels.

CROCODILE MANAGEMENT

In Kakadu crocodile habitats are protected and regular surveys monitor their numbers and distribution.

A crocodile may be captured if showing overt interest towards people or causing problems. It may be released and monitored at the capture site, relocated to another site, or sent to a crocodile farm to avoid creating territorial disputes.

MORTALITY

Few crocodiles reach maturity. Eggs drown as nests are submerged during wet season flooding and small crocodiles are eaten by goannas, birds, fish, other crocodiles and feral pigs. When mature, crocodiles compete with each other for territory, sometimes fighting to the death.

A number of large 'boss' crocodiles have well established territories in Kakadu. Sometimes over 5 metres long, these animals have survived years of peer aggression to become kings in their home ranges. Some remain 'boss' for over 15 years.

FASCINATING FACTS

Crocodile ancestors lived before the age of the dinosaurs, 135 to 65 million years ago. One of the prehistoric crocodiles, *Phobosuchus*, was four times longer than the largest modern crocodile.

Like all reptiles, crocodiles use the environment to regulate their body temperature. While basking in the sun, they open their jaws wide to prevent their brains from overheating. An open mouth can also be a threat.

Nest temperature determines the sex of young crocodiles. Estuarine crocodile nests are incubated by the heat of decomposing vegetation. Freshwater crocodiles lay their eggs in warm sand.

After a territorial dispute the defeated crocodile may venture hundreds of kilometres in search of new territory.

In short bursts crocodiles can travel faster than 10 km per hour. Freshwater crocodiles have been seen reaching 18 km per hour going downhill into the water.

ESTUARINE OR FRESHWATER CROCODILE?

Freshwater crocodile *Crocodylus johnstoni*

Narrow snout

Row of four osteoderms on the 'neck'

Only eyes and snout above the water when resting at the surface

Live in freshwater rivers and billabongs.
Rarely found in tidal rivers

Grows to maximum of about three metres

May live for over 50 years

Feed on many small animals – fish, frogs, lizards, snakes, rats, bats, birds and insects

Lay eggs in sand during dry season

Estuarine (saltwater) crocodile *Crocodylus porosus*

Broad snout

Pronounced raised section behind the 'neck'

Large cranial platform extending behind the eye forms a distinct square patch above the water when resting at the surface

Live in freshwater rivers, coastal and open seas, tidal rivers and billabongs

May grow over six metres long

May live for over 70 years

Feed mostly on fish but may take birds, turtles and large land animals

Cover eggs with mounds of vegetation along river banks in wet season

Tragic deaths and injuries have occurred in the park due to crocodile attacks. For your safety, please read and obey all crocodile warning signs.

For more information contact:
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