



Be Kind Belize Crocodile Fact Sheet



What are crocodiles?

Crocodiles are modern day dinosaurs and have existed for over 200 million years. There are two kinds of Crocodiles living in Belize: American Crocodiles (*Crocodylus acutus*), and freshwater Morelet's crocodiles, (*C. Moreletii*).



Are crocodiles and alligators the same thing?

No. There are **no** alligators in Belize. The main difference between crocodiles and alligators is their teeth. Alligators have an over bite so when they close their mouth you only see their upper teeth. Crocodiles have teeth that interlock when their mouth is shut; so, you will see a crocodile's bottom teeth, especially the fourth tooth back which sticks up from the bottom jaw.



How big can they get?

American crocodiles can grow up to 20 feet long and can live on islands, while the Morelet's are smaller and only grow to about 12 feet and need freshwater to survive.



Where do crocodiles live?

American crocodiles can live on islands because they have special glands on their tongues that help them to get rid of salt. This means they can drink salt water and survive. Morelet's crocodiles must have fresh water and are found in fresh water swamps and marshes as well as in rivers and lakes.



Can crocodiles be pets?

No. It is against the law to keep a crocodile as a pet. Also, most people do not know how to properly care for a crocodile, so they often get very sick when people try to keep them as pets. Crocodiles are wild animals and can never be tamed. Crocodiles grow large very fast and soon become a dangerous size, so large that they can kill and eat their owners. If their owners let them go after they have gotten used to getting food from people, they will be very dangerous to everyone.



Are crocodiles smart?

Yes. Crocodiles are the smartest of all reptiles. They have a very good memory and can plan ahead. They also have very special skills. They are the only know animal in the whole world that can move their own heart valves when they want to in order to change the amount of blood flow to different parts of their bodies. This is very useful to them because they are cold blooded and it helps them to keep warm.





Can crocodiles see well?

Yes. Crocodiles can see in colour and as well as an eagle. Crocodiles . They have natural scuba masks because they have three eyelids. One of those eyelids closes from the inside corner of their eye and protects their eyes under water.

When they are on land they have very good hearing and smell but in water they can close their ears and nostrils. Crocodiles also have special pores called ISO's that detect pressure changes and vibrations in the water. They can even detect vibrations from humans who walk near the water's edge. They use these ISO sensory organs to find prey in murky water.



Can crocodiles talk?

Yes. Of course they can't talk in human language but they have their very own. American crocodiles talk more than any other crocodiles. They jaw smack, tail smack, bellow, and moan; but most crocodile talk happens under the water and in frequencies so low (subsonic) that we cannot hear them.



Why are crocodiles and other apex predators important to us?

Apex predators have no known predators other than humans. They are very important because they keep the environment in balance. Without them many animals would die of disease or overpopulation and our environment would suffer great damage.



Can crocodiles save human lives?

Crocodiles are especially important to humans because in some laboratory studies, their blood has been shown to kill HIV. Much research is still needed before they test it on humans.



Why are crocodiles are in danger of extinction?

Crocodiles are in danger mainly because their habitat is being destroyed by humans. Also, people kill them because they are scared of them or to eat them. Less than 1 out of 100 baby crocodiles survive to become adults. Even though there seem to be a lot of crocodiles in Belize, we should consider ourselves lucky to have them as there are only an about 10,000 to 20,000 American crocodiles left worldwide, making them as rare as polar bears. That is why they are protected and it is against the law to catch or kill a crocodile.



Why is it bad to feed crocodiles?

Firstly it is against the law of Belize and there is a very good reason for that. When crocodiles learn that humans mean food they lose their natural fear of people. This makes them very dangerous to us and our pets.



What can you do if you see anyone feeding or harassing a crocodile?

Ask an adult to call the Belize Forest Department on 501 822 1524 or ACES at 501 631 6366. The arm, leg or life you're saving may be your own.