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## The Estuarine Crocodile

The Estuarine Crocodile, also known as the saltwater Crocodile is the biggest species of the Crocodylidae family. The saltwater crocodile goes by many different names but the most common one is Gator. This species of crocodile is located in the waters of Australia. The first thing to know is that it may be called a saltwater crocodile, but it is found in freshwater areas. The reason is because the Saltwater Crocodile breeds during the wet season which is between the months of November and March. Despite the fact that the Saltwater Crocodile is normally found in saltwater areas, breeding grounds are established in freshwater. Males mark out their territory and become defensive if another male tries to enter his marked territory. Females reach sexual maturity at around ten to twelve years old. Males, on the other hand, do not reach sexual maturity until the age of sixteen years. The female crocodile normally lays forty to sixty eggs, but she can lay up to ninety eggs. The eggs are placed in mounded nests made from plants and mud and then buried.

Since the eggs are laid during the wet season, the nests must be elevated to prevent loss due to floods. The male does not stay with the eggs, but the female stays and protects the nest from predators. After incubation for ninety days, the offspring are hatched, although this time varies with nest temperature. Sex is determined by the temperature of the nest. Males are produced around 31.6 degrees Celsius. If this temperature is increased or decreased just by the smallest amounts, females are produced. The female will unearth the eggs when she hears a chirping sound that the offspring will make after they hatch. She will then help her offspring into the water by carrying them in her mouth and tends to them until they learn how to swim. Saltwater crocodiles are the biggest living reptile on the planet today. When the offspring finally reach adulthood their size can vary greatly. The size of an adult Crocodile ranges from 880 - 1200 pounds with lengths of 14 - 17 feet for males and for females 180 - 220 pounds with lengths of 7.5 to 11 feet. The true size of a gator comes from its age.

One thing to note about saltwater Crocodiles is that they never stop growing as long as they live, so the best factor for the size of a Crocodile is their age. The average life for any gator is 70 years but their age can range from 70 to 100 years. Age is not specific to a saltwater crocodile's size, the size can be very different from the age. For example, the biggest Crocodile ever recorded is called Lolong and he was the largest crocodile in captivity. He was measured at 20 feet 3 inches, and weighed 2,370 pounds, making him one of the largest crocodiles ever measured from snout to tail. He was estimated to be about 50 years old. The population of the saltwater crocodile is still very large. There is no concern for the species yet. There might be in the future because the animal is having habitat loss and is starting to be over hunted for its hide. Its population has been greatly reduced over the years, but overall the saltwater crocodile

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species is only at low risk so far. The crocodiles habitat is most commonly found on the coasts of northern Australia, and the islands of New Guinea and Indonesia. It ranges west as far as the shores of Sri Lanka and eastern India, all along the shorelines and river mouths of southeast Asia to central Vietnam, around Borneo and into the Philippines, and even out to Palau, Vanuatu, and the Solomon Islands.

The Saltwater Crocodile is a predator and has many different types of prey. When young, Saltwater Crocodile is restricted to smaller prey like insects, amphibians, crustaceans and small fish and other small reptiles. When they become an adult, they feed on larger prey such as mud crabs, turtles, snakes, birds, buffalo, wild boar, and even monkeys. When the Saltwater Crocodile hunts for food, it usually hides in the water with only the nostrils, eyes, and part of the back exposed. When the prey approaches, it lunges out of the water and attacks, usually killing its prey with a single snap of its massive jaws. The Saltwater Crocodile then drags the prey under the water where it can be more easily consumed. Saltwater crocodiles can live long lives and grow very large in size. They are some of the most impressive reptiles for their size. They can be considered some of the most dangerous to us but the best way to avoid the danger is to increase self awareness of them.

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