

A Guide to Living with **Crocodiles**



Bill Billings



Florida Fish and Wildlife
Conservation Commission

MyFWC.com



The American crocodile, bottom left, has a narrow, tapered snout. The alligator, top right, has a broad, rounded snout.

American Crocodiles in Florida

Historically, the American crocodile lived in coastal areas of the southern third of Florida and was found as far north as Charlotte County on the Gulf Coast and in the lower Indian River on the Atlantic Coast. While crocodiles are found along the coasts of Mexico, Central and South America and the Caribbean, Florida is the only place in the United States where people can see crocodiles in the wild. They most commonly occur in brackish and saltwater habitats, such as ponds, coves and tidal creeks lined with mangroves. Crocodiles also can be found inland in freshwater habitats due to South Florida's extensive canal system.

The Florida population of the American crocodile is a conservation success story. Listed as an endangered species in 1975, crocodile numbers have since recovered from just a few hundred individuals to as many as 2,000, not including hatchlings. The Florida population is now classified as threatened by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Crocodile sightings have increased as the result of their recovery along with the growing number of people spending time on or near the waters of South Florida. Due to the American crocodile's shy and reclusive nature, conflicts between them and people are extremely rare in Florida. However, as with any predatory animal, people should use caution when near them.

As an imperiled species continuing to recover, American crocodiles must be managed responsibly by balancing the primary consideration of public safety with the recovery needs of crocodiles.

If You See a Crocodile

For American crocodiles to continue their recovery, people must be willing to co-exist with this unique native species when possible. The presence of a crocodile is no reason for immediate concern. Often, the best course of action is to leave the crocodile alone.

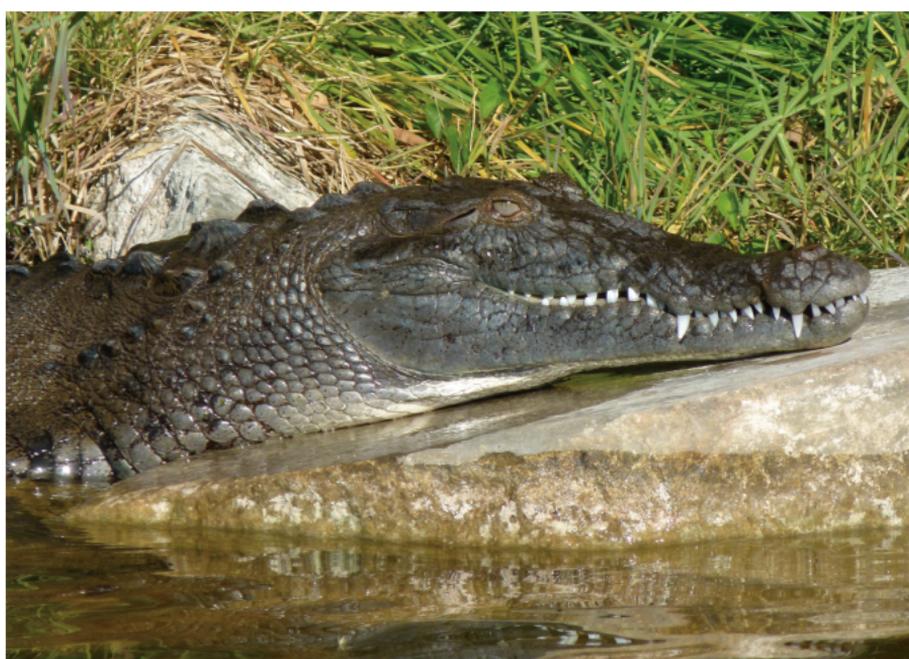
A crocodile may be seen laying on shore exhibiting a behavior known as basking. While basking, it may have its mouth open. However, there is no cause for alarm as the crocodile is only regulating its body temperature. As with all reptiles, crocodiles need to bask to raise their core body temperature, which boosts their metabolism

Natural prey items for crocodiles include fish, reptiles, birds, and small mammals. Animals that resemble their natural prey, such as dogs and cats, are more susceptible to being bitten by crocodiles when in or near the water.

People can safely co-exist with crocodiles by adhering to the following safety tips.

Safety Tips

- Swim only in posted swimming areas.
- Swim only during daylight hours. Crocodiles are most active between dusk and dawn.



A crocodile's fourth tooth on its lower jaw is exposed when the mouth is closed



Bill Billings

Fencing can successfully separate pets from possible crocodile interactions.

- Do not allow pets to swim, exercise, or drink in water that may contain crocodiles as they closely resemble natural prey items of crocodiles. Always keep pets at a safe distance from the water.
- Use fencing or other barriers to separate your pets and family from crocodiles.
- Leave crocodiles alone. State and federal law prohibits killing, harassing or possessing crocodiles.
- When observing or photographing crocodiles, always keep a safe distance from them.
- **Never feed crocodiles** – it is illegal. When fed, crocodiles may become used to people and may be more likely to become a nuisance.
- Inform others that feeding crocodiles is illegal and can create problems for people recreating in or near the water.
- Dispose of fish scraps only in designated waste containers. Discarding scraps in the water may attract crocodiles.
- Feeding other aquatic wildlife such as ducks, fish and turtles also can attract crocodiles by attracting potential prey animals.

What is it?



Keith Kleppinger

Crocodile

- Grayish green on its back
- If present, dark stripes on tail and body
- Fourth tooth on lower jaw exposed when mouth is closed
- Narrow tapered snout



Karen Parker, FWC

Alligator

- Black coloring on its back
- If present, light stripes on tail and body
- Fourth tooth on lower jaw not exposed when mouth is closed
- Broad, rounded snout

If you are concerned about a crocodile in your area, call **1-866-FWC-GATOR (1-866-392-4286)**.

For more information on crocodiles, visit **MyFWC.com/Crocodile**.



Sonya & Freddy Marante

