

## Saltwater Crocodiles

### *Crocodylus porosus*

Estuarine or saltwater crocodiles inhabit mangrove forests, estuary foreshores and other tidal areas. Most grow to about five metres in length, although some males grow to seven metres. Crocodiles are seldom seen above 3 metres in length in the Barron estuary system.

Crocodiles usually feed at night, catching prey either in the water or at the water's edge. They will eat almost anything including turtles, birds, wild pigs, dogs, cattle and people.

They are territorial animals with a homing instinct. If they are taken away from their home area they will travel long distances to return.

When a crocodile is removed (usually to a crocodile farm) another crocodile will often move in to replace it.



Saltwater crocodiles have salt-secreting glands at the back of their tongues that enable them to survive indefinitely without drinking fresh water.

Saltwater crocodiles nest in the wet season, from approximately October to May. A nest is built close to the water where the female tears out grass and scrubs to clear a space. This cleared vegetation is used to make a mound. She lays about fifty eggs within the mound. The rotting vegetation produces heat and acts as a natural incubator for the eggs. The mother stays by the nest and will attack anything that comes near. After ninety days the eggs are ready to hatch. The babies squeak from inside the shells to attract the mother, who then digs the eggs up out of the mound. Each baby has an 'egg tooth' on the tip of its snout to help break through the shell. The young crocodiles don't eat for the first week of their lives as they still have part of the egg yolk in their bodies. Later, the mother carries the babies in her mouth down to the water. Here she will stay with them for up to two months while the babies feed on crabs, prawns and insects. There is a high mortality rate with only about one percent of hatchlings surviving. Adult crocodiles eat most of the young crocodiles before they reach adulthood.

Crocodiles need to warm their bodies in the sun, as unlike mammals they cannot maintain their body heat. Smaller crocs are often seen in the Barron system on mud banks at low tide.

Crocodile Spotting at Holloway's

