



# SALTWATER CROCODILES

The estuarine or saltwater crocodile (*Crocodylus porosus*) is the world's largest living reptile. Salties as they are informally known, grow up to 1500 kg in males and with reported lengths of over 6 m. The extensive crocodile skin trade in the 1960s and 70s nearly wiped out the species, but the species is witnessing a comeback in many locations (including Odisha, West Bengal and the Andaman and Nicobar islands in India). While the saltie is a protected species in India, in some other countries, the species is ranched and harvested for its valuable skin. Each year, a number of human fatalities are attributed to this species in different parts of its range.

## ECOLOGY

Salties are large hypercarnivorous apex predators that ambush their prey. Larger individuals predate upon large prey occasionally including humans. Interesting ecological adaptations in crocodiles include temperature dependent sex determination, and a homing ability that directs relocated crocodiles back to their original territories even several hundred kilometres away.

## BEHAVIOUR

Like several other species of crocodiles, female saltwater crocodiles exhibit parental care. Saltie mothers are diligent parents that defend their nests, excavate nesting material responding to the 'yelping' call of newly emerged hatchlings, gently carry hatchlings to the water and protect them for extended periods of time. Despite this only about 1% of hatchlings survive to adulthood. Adult male salties are aggressive to each other. With superlative communication skills that includes visual displays, olfaction and vocalisations, salties are considered to be among the most intelligent reptiles.



## DISTRIBUTION

Saltwater crocodiles are among the most widely distributed of all crocodilians. They can be found in coastal and marine systems in southern and eastern India, Sri Lanka, most of Southeast Asia, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Micronesia, the Solomon Islands and northern Australia. In countries such as Australia and Papua New Guinea, salties are distributed in freshwater ecosystems far inland.



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