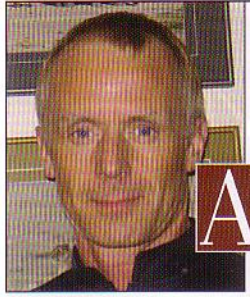


CREATURE FEATURE

crocodiles

by Cyril Brass



American Crocodiles are one of the most prehistoric looking animals in the world today. The massive reptiles' physical appearances and living habits have changed little over thousands and thousands of years.

These cold-blooded animals require an external resource to warm up their body, to get the blood flowing, allowing them to become mobile. They spend the day basking on river banks and shorelines in the hot tropical sunshine. Unable to regulate their body temperatures internally like humans do, they soak up the sun's heat to regulate their body temperature.

Crocodiles are superbly adapted for life in the water. With the nostrils and eyes positioned atop the head for easy breathing and vision, the rest of the body can be completely submerged below the water's surface.

These semi-aquatic creatures possess effective hunting skills. They patiently wait in the murky waters near shorelines for coati, peccary, deer, and other animals coming to the

river for a drink. Remaining completely motionless in the water, they wait . . . and wait. When the prey comes close they attack quickly, grasping onto the animal with their vice-like jaws, drowning it using the well known technique, the "death roll".

Crocodiles do not chew their food. They hold on to it with their powerful jaws, tear it with razor sharp teeth, and swallow. Their stomach is able to dissolve everything including the bones. These reptiles are able to go for extreme periods between meals because when they do eat, they can devour up to half their body weight at one time. SO if you go swimming in water with crocodiles, pray they have all recently eaten.

The American Crocodiles are considered less aggressive than the saltwater crocodiles in Australia and Africa. This species of crocodile is considered shy and reclusive and more likely to flee at the sight of humans.

People get confused between the American Crocodile and the American Alligator which inhabits the Florida Everglades.

To differentiate a crocodile from an alligator, look closely at the shape of the head, visible teeth, coloration and habitat. But not too close!

The crocodile has a V shaped head with tapered nose while the alligator has a U shaped head with rounded snout. The mouth of the crocodile reveals both lower and upper teeth with the 4th tooth on the bottom jaw exposed when the mouth is closed. Only the upper teeth are visible on alligators when the mouth is closed. Crocodiles are lighter in coloration than alligators. Crocodiles prefer to live in slow moving brackish water (saltwater and freshwater mixed) or salt water, while alligators choose freshwater rivers, swamps and sometimes peoples' swimming pools.

The American Crocodile . . . a cold blooded reptile . . . a powerful swimmer . . . a skilful hunter **ca**

*Cyril Brass is a Wildlife and Sports Photographer living in Calgary.
www.cyrilbrass.com
403-999-1908*

