



CROCS. vs Alligators

Crocodiles and alligators; they're pretty much the same thing, right? If one of them is chasing you down, I'm sure the differences won't matter much, but there are more differences than you might first assume.

Crocodiles

In total, there are 13 species of crocodile. They vary in size from the 5.5 feet long dwarf crocodile that weighs up to 15 pounds, all the way to the enormous saltwater crocodile that can reach lengths of 6 metres and weigh in at nearly 2000 pounds!

Like their relatives, alligators and caimans, crocodiles are strictly carnivores. In the wild, they eat almost anything that enters their territory; birds, fish, frogs and mammals. Crocodiles' jaws aren't capable of chewing. Instead, they bite down on their prey and crush it until they can swallow it whole. Both crocodiles and alligators often employ a move called a "death roll", where they will bite down on an animal and then twist their body round to break the bones of their prey.

Crocodiles inhabit rivers, lakes, wetlands and saltwater regions in tropical parts of Africa, Asia and Australia. They are also found in tropical areas of Central America.



When crocodiles close their mouths, you can normally see both sets of teeth. They also have narrow, v-shaped snouts.

Alligators

Alligators, on the other hand, have shorter, rounder snouts and, when they close their mouths, you can usually only see the upper teeth. As I said, if one of them is about to have a nibble on your leg, this probably won't be the first thing you think about!

Where some crocodiles live in saltwater areas, alligators only live in freshwater environments. One such area is the Florida Everglades – a vast wetland in Florida. This is the only place in the world where both crocodiles and alligators live together.

Alligators' shorter snouts are much stronger than crocodiles, which means they can crush shelled prey such as turtles. Their grey or black scales are also often much darker than crocodiles, which



are usually brown or tan.

Both alligators and crocodiles have sensory “pits” on their jaw. These are extremely sensitive to water pressure and allow them to detect even the slightest movement in the water.

Despite their reputation, alligators are actually the more docile of the two families. They often only attack humans when they are extremely hungry, whereas crocodiles seem to want to attack just because you happen to be nearby. Equally, crocodiles are much more active in the water, whereas alligators prefer to stay still and sunbathe.

Alligators also live shorter lives than crocodiles. Alligators in the wild tend to live between 30 and 50 years, whereas crocodiles can easily reach 70 and even live up to 100 years.

Alligators are only native to the United States, Mexico and China.



Caiman

Caimans are more closely related to alligators than crocodiles. There are six species that are found across Central and South America. They prefer to live in mangrove swamps, slowly moving rivers and lakes. Almost all species of caiman are endangered due to habitat loss and poaching.

Their scales are often green, grey or brown, and they can sometimes be covered in pale stripe or spots for camouflage. Like crocodiles, they have narrow snouts.



SUMMARY FOCUS

Write a paragraph summarising the main similarities and differences between crocodiles and alligators.

VIPERS QUESTIONS

R

Where are caiman native to?

V

Which word in the text means “as well as this”?

R

Where is the only place that crocodiles and alligators live together in the wild?

R

Which type of reptile in the text has patterned skin to help them camouflage?

I

If you were in the Everglades, which animal would you sooner bump into, and why?