

Saltwater Crocodiles

Origin

Crocodiles are believed to have originated approximately 84 million years ago during the late Cretaceous period. Their ancestors were large reptiles known as pseudosuchians which were similar to modern-day crocodiles. Over time, they evolved into the crocodiles we know today. As for their presence in India, it is believed that crocodiles have inhabited the country for millions of years. They can be found in various wetlands, rivers, and lakes across the country.

Cultural heritage

Crocodiles have been a part of Indian culture and mythology for thousands of years. In Hindu mythology, they are associated with the god of creation, Brahma, and are revered as symbols of strength, power, and good fortune. In Hindu tradition, they are believed to have the power to ward off evil spirits and protect the earth from natural disasters.

Population and Subspecies in India

The population and distribution of crocodiles in India are primarily concentrated in the states of Assam, Uttar Pradesh, and Odisha. The population of crocodiles in India is estimated to be around 5,000-10,000 individuals. There are three species of crocodiles found in India – the Saltwater Crocodile, freshwater crocodile and the Gharial.

The Saltwater Crocodile, also known as the estuarine crocodile, is the largest living reptile on Earth. They can grow up to 6 meters in length and weigh up to 1,000 kilograms. They are found in the saltwater habitats of the Sundarbans

mangrove forests and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in India. These powerful predators are apex predators and play an important role in maintaining the balance of ecosystems by controlling the populations of prey species. They have a reputation for being highly aggressive and are considered to be one of the most dangerous animals in the world.

The Gharial Crocodile, also known as the gavial, is a species of crocodile that is native to India. It is highly endangered, with a long and narrow snout that is adapted for catching fish. Gharials are found in the rivers of northern India and are considered a unique species due to their specialized feeding behavior.

Saltwater Crocodile

Habitat

They are found in brackish water environments, such as estuaries, where freshwater meets saltwater. In India, the largest population of crocodiles can be found in the Sundarbans mangrove forest, located in the delta of the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna rivers. This region provides an ideal habitat for crocodiles as it has a large network of rivers, creeks, and lagoons, as well as a dense cover of mangrove trees, which provide a suitable environment for basking and nesting. Crocodiles prefer to live in areas where the water is warm and still, allowing them to efficiently hunt their prey and regulate their body temperature. They are also known to move between habitats, traveling long distances in search of food, mates, and suitable breeding sites. Overall, the habitat of crocodiles is a crucial factor in their survival and plays a significant role in their behavior, feeding habits, and reproductive success.

The saltwater crocodiles are also found swimming in the ocean

for many kilometers. As their range expands, they can be seen hunting in deep waters. Its rare but they have been reported to be seen many miles into the oceans.

Food habit

They feed on a variety of prey, including fish, crustaceans, mammals, birds, and reptiles. In India, their diet primarily consists of fish and other aquatic animals, as well as mammals that come to the water's edge to drink. Crocodiles are ambush hunters and use their powerful jaws and sharp teeth to catch and kill their prey. They have a unique hunting technique called the "death roll," where they spin rapidly in the water to tear apart large prey items into smaller pieces that are easier to swallow. Crocodiles are also known to wait patiently for their prey, hiding in the water with just their eyes and nostrils above the surface. They use their keen senses of hearing, sight, and smell to locate potential prey, and then attack with lightning-fast speed. In addition to hunting actively, crocodiles are also opportunistic feeders and will take advantage of carrion (dead animals) and other easy food sources. They have slow metabolic rates and can survive for long periods without food, which allows them to conserve energy and use it efficiently when hunting.

Overall, the food habits of crocodiles in India are diverse and depend on the availability of prey in their habitat. However, their hunting and feeding behaviors are a crucial component of their survival and help them to maintain their position as top predators in their ecosystem.

Lifestyle

Male and female crocodiles differ in size, with males typically being larger in size than females. Adult male crocodiles in India can reach lengths of up to 20 feet, while females are usually around half that size. Another notable

difference between the two sexes is their vocalizations. Male crocodiles make loud bellowing calls during the breeding season to attract females, while females are quieter. Crocodiles mate during the monsoon season, typically from June to August in India. During this time, male crocodiles make loud calls to attract females and engage in territorial displays to establish dominance over potential mates. After mating, females build nests out of vegetation and lay eggs, which they then protect until they hatch. In terms of behavior, male crocodiles are generally more aggressive than females, particularly during the breeding season. They will defend their territory and mates from intruders and are known to fight each other over access to mates. Crocodile eggs are usually laid in nests made of vegetation and the female protects the eggs until they hatch. Offspring reach adulthood at around 10-12 years of age. Crocodiles are solitary creatures and generally do not prefer to live in groups. However, during the breeding season and when basking, they may be seen in close proximity to one another.

Significance

Crocodiles play a crucial role in maintaining the balance of their ecosystem, and their loss would have a negative impact on other species. In many cultures, crocodiles are considered important symbols and play a role in local beliefs and traditions. Crocodiles help to control populations of other animals and prevent overgrazing, which is important for maintaining healthy ecosystems. With their populations declining, it is important to take steps to protect crocodiles and prevent them from becoming endangered

Population and distribution in

India of saltwater crocs

The saltwater crocodiles are found in the coastal areas where there are rivers and swamps and lagoons. They are in good numbers along the east coast of India from West Bengal to Tamil Nadu. As they are huge and need a large area to survive, they are less in numbers. The estimated number can be anywhere between 100 to 300 along the coasts.

Protected areas

Sundarbans National Park is an important park where they are found in good numbers. These crocodiles can be seen basking in the sun along the many islands in the park. They are quite common.

Mahanadi Delta boasts a good number of crocodiles in India. They have a natural place to live and hunt and they can be spotted many times in the delta region.

Bhittarkanika Mangrove in Orissa is another place where these crocodiles can be seen easily.

Other than above, they can be spotted in the mangroves along the east coast of India.