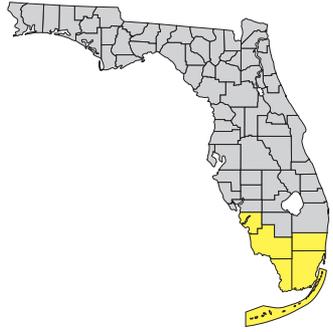


AMERICAN CROCODILE

Crocodylus acutus

Order: Crocodylia
Family: Crocodylidae
FNAI Ranks: G2/S1
U.S. Status: Endangered
FL Status: Endangered



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juvenile © Barry Mansell

Description: A large, gray to brown crocodylian with a long, tapered snout. All ages may have dark crossbands or spots on back, tail, and legs; belly whitish. Fourth tooth of lower jaw shows prominently (except in very young) when mouth is closed. Adults 7 - 15 ft. (2.1 - 4.6 m), hatchlings about 10 in. (254 mm). Often basks with mouth open.

AMERICAN CROCODILE

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Similar Species: Alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*; see species account) is nearly black above, although juvenile has light crossbands; usually basks with mouth closed. Spectacled caiman (*Caiman crocodilus*), introduced in southern Florida, rarely exceeds 6 ft. (1.8 m) and has curved, bony, crosswise ridge in front of eyes. Both species have broadly rounded snouts without prominently projecting fourth lower tooth.

Habitat: Coastal estuarine marshes, tidal swamps, and creeks along edges of mainland and islands. Usually associated with mangroves. Nests on beaches, stream banks, and levees.

Seasonal Occurrence: Most active from late winter to fall; nests in April and May; eggs hatch in summer. Less active during cool weather, though usually basks on sunny winter days.

Florida Distribution: Chiefly coastal waters at southern end of peninsula, with breeding occurring from southern Biscayne Bay to Cape Sable, as well as on Key Largo and some islands in Florida Bay. Additional nesting, though without apparent success, has been recorded near Marco Island, Collier County. Occasionally wanders into Lower Keys as well as northward up coasts to Lee and Broward counties.

Range-wide Distribution: Florida, Greater Antilles, Mexico, and Central and South America.

Conservation Status: Most of Florida breeding range is protected by Everglades National Park, Crocodile Lake National Wildlife Refuge, and a private corporation. Small population size leaves it vulnerable to catastrophes such as hurricanes and disease. Some individuals are killed by automobiles on U.S. Route 1 and Card Sound Road.

Protection and Management: Devote crocodile habitat to natural resources rather than recreation. Provide several suitable wildlife crossings beneath U.S. Route 1. Educate public about non-aggressive nature of species.

Selected References: Ashton and Ashton 1991, Bartlett and Bartlett 1999, Conant and Collins 1991, Gaby et al. 1985, Kushlan and Mazzotti 1989, Moler (ed.) 1992, Neill 1971, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1984.