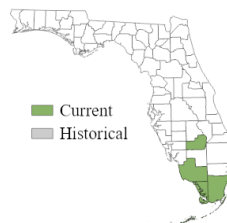


AMERICAN CROCODILE

Crocodylus acutus



Order: Crocodylia
Family: Crocodylidae
FNAI Ranks: G2/S2
U.S. Status: Threatened
FL Status: Threatened

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.

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 crocodylus*), 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: Florida is the northern limit of the species' global range. Breeding populations in the state are restricted to southern Florida (Dade and Monroe Counties), principally Everglades National Park and Florida Bay, including Key Largo. Speculation about a breeding population in the Lower Keys is unsubstantiated and unlikely. Individuals may wander along coasts as far north as Tampa Bay. Historical range centered on the southern tip of mainland Florida but extended at least as far north as Sanibel Island and Sarasota County on the west coast, Indian River County on the Atlantic coast, and southward into the Florida Keys (USFWS 2007). The primary

historical nesting area in Florida was on the mainland shore of Florida and Biscayne bays, including many of the small islands near shore, in what is today Everglades National Park, and it also included the upper Florida Keys from Key Largo south to Lower Matecumbe Key (see USFWS 2007). Today most nesting occurs on the mainland shore of Florida Bay between Cape Sable and Key Largo, but the nesting range also includes Biscayne Bay and the upper Florida Keys, with unsuccessful nesting north to Marco Island (USFWS 2007)

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: Restore natural hydrology to the Everglades ecosystem. Install road underpasses on Key Largo. Study Key Biscayne National Monument to see if it is appropriate for restocking.

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.



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