



## American Crocodile at Fort Jefferson



Visitors often ask, is it true there is a crocodile at Dry Tortugas National Park? Yes. Yes there is.

### Arrival to Dry Tortugas National Park

The animal is a member of the species *Crocodylus acutus*, commonly referred to as the American crocodile. It arrived here of its own volition in 2003.

The American Crocodile is considered to be an estuarine crocodile. On mainland southern

Florida and in the upper Keys they tend to prefer brackish waters. The habitat is more saline here at the Tortugas, but the crocodile seems to be thriving, receiving much needed hydration from prey items such as birds and fish.

### Crocodile Capture

In 2005 and 2006 two unsuccessful attempts were made to capture the crocodile, in order to assess and monitor its health condition, species, and origin. But in 2008 they caught the croc and made several biometric measurements before releasing it.

The croc was measured at 252 centimeters long. Genetic analysis indicates its mother was from the Everglades population. Its father's origin was less clear, with DNA most closely matching crocodiles of Jamaican origin. As of May 2014, he is 272.2 cm total length.

In the 1970s the American Crocodile was listed as an endangered species, with a population estimated at 300 individuals, all in the Everglades and Upper Keys. Once the species was under protection, the population rebounded to

approximately 2,000 to 3,000 individuals. The species status was changed from endangered to threatened.

Because of the success of conservation efforts, crocodiles are now being seen in places where people are unaccustomed to seeing them. Like here.



Wildlife Biologist Mark Parry taking measurements

## American Crocodile Range

The American Crocodile is distributed throughout the islands of the Caribbean, though, and individuals have been seen swimming hundreds

of miles at sea. So it is not [illogical] that one should arrive here.



American Crocodile sunning on fort rubble



Species map courtesy of crocodilian.com/

## Wildlife Safety

The American crocodile is considered the least aggressive of the larger species of crocodilian in the world. They have never been known to attack a human at the Dry Tortugas, in Florida, or in the United States. They prefer small prey such as crabs, fish and birds. Still, it is a crocodile and a wild animal and should be respected as such. (All wildlife should be respected, especially in a national park.)

Like the sharks and other creatures often seen here at the Dry Tortugas, keep in mind that the crocodile is a predatory creature and may display unexpected behaviors.

You need not fear an attack while visiting the park, but to minimize risk, keep the following in mind:

- Avoid entering the water at night, near dawn and dusk, or alone.

- Never feed the crocodile or throw food or any items into the water.

-Respect their nature and observe them from a distance

-Stay at least 5 meters away and do NOT approach them.

- If you find yourself in the water near the crocodile, maintain visual contact and move away from them without splashing or appearing to flee.

- Do not panic and do not look uncomfortable in the water. Keep movements smooth, calm, and deliberate.

REMEMBER: American Crocodiles are a threatened and Federally protected species, and it is illegal to feed, harm or harass them.



Top Photo: Cocodile tracks on East Key

Bottom Photo: Crocodile swimming to East Key

## Contact Information

For further information about this or other related wildlife questions in Dry Tortugas National Park please contact:

Tracy Ziegler  
Fisheries and Marine Biologist  
Dry Tortugas National Park  
Tracy\_Ziegler@nps.gov

Photo credits: Jonathan Taggart, Ron Harvey, and crocodilian.com/