



Gator or Croc? Field Card

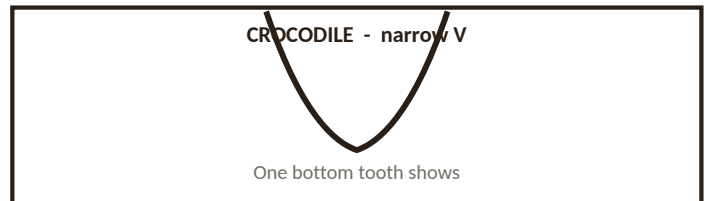
Tell the two apart in the wild - or in a photograph.

Name _____

Date _____

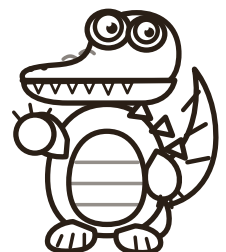
Look at	ALLIGATOR	CROCODILE
Snout	Broad U-shaped snout built for crushing	Narrow V-shaped snout built for gripping
Tooth overbite	Upper jaw is wider, so lower teeth tuck out of sight	Fourth lower tooth sits outside the upper lip
Salt glands	Glands on the tongue are present but do not work well	Working salt glands let it shed excess salt
Sense organs	Pressure-sensing pits on the jaws only	Pressure-sensing pits over most of the body
Range overlap	Southeastern USA, plus a separate species in China	Caribbean and the Americas; south Florida is the only natural overlap
Habitat	Freshwater marsh, swamp, river and lake	Coastal mangrove, estuary and brackish bay

The quickest check: look at the snout



Worth knowing

- Crocodilians are archosaurs. Their closest living relatives are not lizards or snakes - they are birds.
- The snout shape follows the diet: a broad alligator snout resists the twisting forces of crushing hard prey, while a narrow crocodile snout moves through water with less drag when snatching fish.
- Salt glands are the reason the American crocodile can cross open sea between islands and the American alligator cannot.





Field Test

Write G for alligator or C for crocodile beside each one.

Name _____

Date _____

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1. Narrow V-shaped snout, olive colouring, photographed in a mangrove estuary in the Florida Keys.

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2. Pressure-sensing pits found only along the jaws; animal recovered from a freshwater river in Georgia.

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3. Fourth mandibular tooth visible outside the upper lip when the jaws are closed.

☐

4. Broad crushing snout; population extends from Texas to North Carolina.

☐

5. Functional lingual salt glands allow long periods in brackish water.

Draw it

In the box below, draw the snout of an alligator and label the one clue you would use to identify it from a photograph.

Gator or Croc? - Field Test answers

- 1. Crocodile** Narrow V-shaped snout, olive colouring, photographed in a mangrove estuary in the Florida Keys.
- 2. Alligator** Pressure-sensing pits found only along the jaws; animal recovered from a freshwater river in Georgia.
- 3. Crocodile** Fourth mandibular tooth visible outside the upper lip when the jaws are closed.
- 4. Alligator** Broad crushing snout; population extends from Texas to North Carolina.
- 5. Crocodile** Functional lingual salt glands allow long periods in brackish water.

Teaching note

The closed-mouth tooth test is the most reliable field mark and the one worth drilling: an alligator's wider upper jaw hides the lower teeth, while a crocodile's fourth lower tooth stays visible. Colour and size are unreliable - both vary with age, water and light.