

Vision

That Jamaica's natural resources are used in a sustainable way and that there is broad understanding of environment, planning and development issues, with extensive participation amongst citizens and a high level of compliance with relevant legislation.

Mission

To promote Sustainable Development by ensuring protection of the environment and orderly development in Jamaica through highly motivated staff performing at the highest standard.



*Managing & protecting
Jamaica's Land, Wood & Water*

For additional information on Crocodiles and other protected species, contact:

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*Create an Environment
for Clean Living.*

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NATIONAL
ENVIRONMENT AND
PLANNING AGENCY
(NEPA)

Crocodiles

“The last of
the dinosaurs”



What are crocodiles ?

Crocodiles are one of Jamaica's wild animals and one of the oldest living creatures in the world. Scientists believe that they have changed very little in body shape since the time of the dinosaurs about 160 million years ago. They are large lizard-like animals that can grow up to 5 metres in length.

How do they behave ?

They are shy animals that are active at nights and prefer to be left alone. In the wild, they retreat or submerge at the slightest disturbance. However, if cornered or attacked they will adopt a "threatened posture" and even attack in defense. During the breeding season the females become more aggressive than usual.

Where are they found ?

There are 21 species of crocodiles found in wetlands, rivers and lakes throughout the world's tropic and subtropical regions. There is only one species in Jamaica, the American Crocodile (*Crocodylus acutus*). It is found primarily along the southern coast, from St. Thomas to Westmoreland. Smaller populations are also found in Hanover and Trelawny. They are often found hidden in the quiet areas of the wetlands, preferably where there is brackish water and a good supply of food.



What do they eat ?

Crocodiles are carnivorous (meat eaters) and will eat a variety of small animals. Adult crocodiles eat birds, frogs, crabs, snakes, sick fish and other small animals. The young crocodiles feed on insects, snails and "ticky-ticky" fish. If food is difficult to find, adult crocodiles will scavenge through garbage dumped along rivers, in wetlands and along beaches.

Do crocodiles have babies ?

Crocodiles breed and nest from March to August. During this period, the animals can be seen moving from place to place in search of nesting areas. They will protect these areas and therefore should be left alone.

Are crocodiles important ?

Crocodiles are not only important as living links to our past, but they also have historical, biological and economical importance.

- The crocodile is on the Crest of the Jamaica Coat of Arms, which is a badge of great historical significance to the nation.
- Crocodiles eat dead and dying animals, thus keeping our waters free of disease. Their holes and burrows provide refuge and water for other wild animals during times of drought. They fertilise the swamps.
- Currently they provide foreign exchange as attractions for eco-tourism. As more and more nations implement conservation programmes, crocodile farming and tanning industries have become a practical demonstration of the rational use of this wildlife resource. In the future, this can also be done in Jamaica. It will provide employment for people in rural communities and generate more foreign exchange.

What is the status of crocodiles in Jamaica ?

Crocodiles are an endangered species worldwide. In Jamaica, the population of crocodiles is threatened by destruction of wetlands, hunting and killing.

Since 1971 Crocodiles have been protected by law under the Wild Life Protection Act. Therefore, no crocodile should be hunted, captured, killed or in any way harassed. **It is also illegal to have in your possession, the whole or any part of a crocodile without special permission from NEPA. The penalty for disobeying this law is \$100,000.00 or 12 months imprisonment.**

What is being done for crocodiles in Jamaica ?

NEPA is responsible for managing the crocodile population in Jamaica. Currently there is a Crocodile Rescue, Research and Operations Committee, comprising NEPA, the Hope Zoo, several NGOs and private individuals. This group is responsible for removal and relocation of nuisance animals and general assessment of the population. It is also responsible for formulating strategies and policies for an effective management plan.

If you see a crocodile

- **Remain** calm. If you are in a swamp or river, chances are it will go away. However for your own safety stay clear of the area.
- **Stay** clear of rivers and swamps during the breeding season, (March to August).

If the animal is seen in a residential area, or near to places people use regularly **stay clear of it.**

Call NEPA or the police. Other numbers to call are Hope Zoo (927-1085); Negril Coral Reef Preservation Society (957-3735).

Remember If you see a crocodile, leave it alone and it will leave you alone.

Don't ...

- Go fishing, swimming or bathing in rivers where there are crocodiles.
- Tie small animals such as goats or pigs close to rivers or swamps with crocodiles.
- Dump garbage or other refuse in rivers, swamps or on beaches. This will attract crocodiles.