

## The Crocs Migrate

*By Rosemarie Chung*

Cara Croc looked worriedly at her husband as he came barging into the burrow they shared with their two children in the St. Catherine swamp. It wasn't like him to move so fast. Usually he moved with the unhurried grace characteristic of their kind: slow and deliberate, almost as if they had nothing better in the world to do. Except of course when they went after a fish or crab. Then their speed was unbelievable: almost like lightning, the other animals said.

Not that they had much chance to show off that skill these days, the swamp was becoming increasingly filled with all sorts of strange things: every month, almost, there was the sound of the big animal that made the strange noise. The first time it happened, Cara was in the middle of nesting. Suddenly she heard a loud frightening noise, unlike anything she had ever heard before, and a big animal with four round legs dumped a load of soil right in front of her. Cara had gone crying to Charlie, hoping he would know what the strange animal was, but he didn't know either.

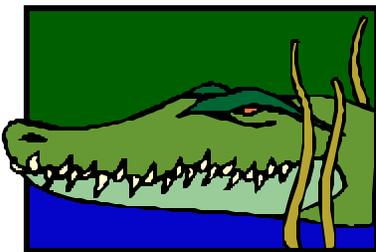
When the Crocs checked around the swamp, nobody seemed to know anything about this strange noisy animal that spat out soil. All they knew was that it came more and more often and every time it came, the swamp got smaller and smaller. Cara and the other lady Crocs worried that soon there would be no more swamp for them to live in. They talked about it when they

got together for a bask on girls' afternoon out. The men were worried too: the ladies could see it in their eyes. But they said nothing to the ladies. Cara saw that same look in her husband's eyes as he came into their hole.

“What's wrong, dear?” Cara asked him. “Let's get the children to bed first”, Charlie answered. Cara was really worried now. They didn't hide much from the children: crocs had to grow up fast. They had to learn to swim and hunt real quickly. Cara and Charlie took turns teaching them how to glide almost silently, their eyes barely visible above the water. Then they would show them how to dive suddenly when they saw a fish or crab that looked like it would be good to eat. They would pounce with a burst of speed and grab the animal. Eight times out of ten it worked, although in recent months they had less and less of the swamp to do this in.

As Cara settled little Carinie into their space in the burrow while Charlie settled Carina, she wondered what was bothering her husband now. Well, she sighed as she kissed Carinie good night, she would soon know.

The two adult crocs swam out of the burrow and onto the nearby bank when the children were safely asleep. “What's the matter, honey?” Cara asked worriedly. “Is it the four round legs again?”



Charlie sighed as he settled on a log. “ They’re coming more and more often” he said. “Today at Croc Council we decided that it was time we moved from here. Try to find another swamp where there is water and food.”

“Move? But I’ve lived here all my life!” Cara explained, “the children were born here! Our parents died here. I don’t want to move. I will not move! Why is this happening to us?”

“You know Johnny Croc, the guy who moved here a month ago?”

Cara nodded, almost in tears. “Well he said the same thing happened in his swamp, and that why he swam here by sea. The two-legged ones filled up the swamp with soil and stones and built houses. And all the Crocs had to scatter to find new homes. He ended up here.”

“Not a good choice, as it turns out,” Cara pointed out. “Now he has to move too. Are we going by sea?”

“No,” Charlie replied. “ That route is too long with the children. We may dry out before we reach the sea. The Council decided that our family would try a new route, through the shiny burrows that the two-legged ones have put in.”

“Are you sure it’s safe?” Cara asked.

“We think so”, said Charlie, “ it’s covered and at least there’s water there. We may even find food.”

“When do we leave?” asked Cara. “Tomorrow, if that’s OK with you,” Charlie answered. “ We don’t all want to leave at once, and if we don’t leave soon, we may stay here and die. We are leaving first because our children are the youngest.”

The next evening, Charlie and Cara said a tearful good-bye to their friends and family as they set out into the unknown. Everyone brought something, even a piece of fish, so they left with full stomachs and heavy hearts.

As they set off for the big shiny burrows, Charlie leading the way, the children in the middle, Cara bringing up the rear, Cara felt so nervous her legs wobbled with every stroke. She could tell Charlie was nervous too, by the way his tail switched even when it didn’t need to. She knew he was asking himself the same questions.

What lay before them? Where did the shiny burrows lead? Would they find another swamp where they could hunt for food and swim in peace? Would they even make it through this shiny burrow that the two legs had built? Cara tried to put her nervousness aside and smile bravely at the children as they turned to look at her.

Everything seemed OK until they entered the shiny burrow. It was a strange place, smooth on the inside and the water was unlike anything they had ever swum in. It was dark and smelly and didn’t seem to have any food at all, not even the tiki-tiki fish that the baby crocodiles ate. Cara gave thanks for the generosity of their friends and relatives. She felt the nervousness rise up in her again, causing all the toes on her hind feet to tremble.

Suddenly, the shiny burrows ended and the Crocs emerged into a shallow canal. They hardly had time to adjust to the newness of it before they heard screams. The frightened Crocs huddled together and got into their defensive stance as they tried to figure out what was happening. All around them there were two-legged ones of all sizes, running and shouting. What did this mean?

