

GUIDELINES FOR KEEPING CROCODILES IN THE NT

Crocodiles are potentially dangerous to humans, and for this reason extreme caution must be exercised when keeping or handling them in captivity. Prospective crocodile owners should be well informed about the needs and requirements for keeping these animals in captivity.

Permits

The keeping of protected wildlife in the Northern Territory is regulated by a permit system under the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 2006* (TPWC Act). Conditions are included on permits, and the Parks and Wildlife Service of the Northern Territory (PWSNT) may issue infringement notices or cancel permits if conditions are breached. A *Permit to Keep Protected Wildlife* enables people to legally possess native vertebrate animals in captivity in the Northern Territory. The permit system assists the PWSNT to monitor wildlife kept in captivity and to detect any illegal activities associated with the keeping of, and trade in, native wildlife.

Crocodiles are protected throughout the Northern Territory and may not be removed from the wild without the appropriate licences and permits. People are required to hold a *Keep Permit* to legally keep crocodiles in the Northern Territory.

Premises will be inspected by PWSNT staff to evaluate their suitability **prior** to any *Keep Permit* for crocodiles being granted. Approvals may also be required from local councils, the Northern Territory Planning Authority, and the Department of Health and Community Services. Consignment of crocodiles between the Northern Territory and other States and Territories can only be undertaken with an appropriate import / export permit.

There are two species of crocodile permitted to be kept in captivity in the Northern Territory:

- *Crocodylus johnstoni* Freshwater Crocodile
- *Crocodylus porosus* Saltwater Crocodile

Crocodiles must be obtained from a legal source (i.e. another permit holder). A *Keep Permit* does not allow the holder to remove crocodiles from the wild.

Pre-requisites and Restrictions

Crocodiles measuring **less than 60cm** in length (hatchlings).

1. Crocodiles measuring less than 60cm in length may be kept as pets in urban areas providing the animal is housed in a secure aquarium or enclosure.
2. Once a crocodile reaches a length of 60cm, it must be surrendered either by returning it to the place of purchase, or contacting the PWSNT for advice.

Crocodiles measuring **greater than 60cm** in length

1. Crocodiles measuring greater than 60cm in length will only be permitted to be kept as pets in some rural areas where the owner has a significant quantity of land, and the potential threat of the crocodile to members of the public is minimal. Before making arrangements to keep larger crocodiles, interested individuals must consult the PWSNT to determine whether a permit for keeping a crocodile on their property can be issued.
2. Crocodile enclosures must conform to the following safety standards which provide reasonable precautions to prevent the escape of crocodiles and are the minimum standards for farm situations:
 - The perimeter of the fence must be made up of 50mm-1800mm chain mesh concreted into the ground to a depth of 300mm. Fence posts are to be set in concrete to a depth of 900mm. The top of the fence is to consist of 3 strands of barbed wire.
 - The gate into the enclosure is to be made of chain mesh (50mm-1800mm), is to be self-closing, open inwards and be fitted with a padlock. The concrete barrier at the base of the chain mesh will extend under the gate.

It is recommended that crocodile owners complete a senior first aid certificate and keep a trauma kit on hand in case of an emergency.

Exotic crocodiles (including alligators) cannot be kept by private permit holders in the Northern Territory.

Housing

Owners are responsible for maintaining suitable conditions for crocodiles in accordance with the *Northern Territory Animal Welfare Act 2000*. Owners are expected to provide protection for crocodiles against predators, disease, pain, distress, suffering and injury.

The enclosure (including aquariums) must cover a minimum area equivalent to three times the length of the crocodile multiplied by twice its length.

Crocodiles require a pool of water that is large and deep enough to enable the crocodile to completely submerge. It is recommended that between 60-75% of the bottom of the tank or enclosure is water.

There must be sufficient dry ground to enable the animal to exit the water completely to bask itself and turn around comfortably. The land substrate should consist of a large flat rock, stones or pebbles. As a general guideline, the land area should be approximately 25-40% of the total area of the tank or enclosure.

The crocodile must have exposure to sun and shade within the pool as well as on dry ground so that the animal may regulate its temperature. Shade is very important because crocodiles may burn and/or overheat. In particular, young crocodiles must have shelter. A piece of wood or plastic suspended over the land or water is ideal for this purpose.

Water temperatures must be maintained at between 26°C and 29°C. At night a water heater should be left on.

Crocodiles prefer air temperatures that range between 29°C and 33°C. These temperatures should be established prior to purchasing the crocodile to ensure that the conditions are suitable before introducing the animal.

Precautions must be taken to prevent a crocodile from escaping by climbing up the sides of a tank. This is possible by placing a secure lid with adequate ventilation on top of the tank.

Feeding

Unlike most domestic pets, crocodiles do not require daily feeding. Feeding requirements will vary depending on a crocodile's age, breeding activity and general environmental conditions. Juvenile crocodiles should be fed 1–3 times per week. The total weight of food provided should be approximately 5% of the crocodiles own body mass.

Crocodiles require sufficient quantities of food and water to sustain healthy growth and vitality. Under natural conditions, crocodiles have a varied diet which may comprise insects, fish, frogs, lizards, crustaceans and small mammals. A diet solely comprising pieces of chicken or beef is not suitable for captive crocodiles.

Uneaten food should be removed within 24 hours to prevent it from decomposing.

Young crocodiles will benefit from the addition of vitamin supplements to their diets. This is less important if the animal is receiving whole prey, as this diet will ensure that the crocodile receives necessary vitamins and minerals.

In the wild, crocodiles eat stones to assist in digestion. They will also ingest stones in captivity if stones of appropriate size are available.

Live animals must not be fed to crocodiles. However, live fish and insects may be placed in the water to encourage the crocodile to feed.

Crocodiles require access to fresh water at all times. Water should be maintained at an adequate level and allow the crocodile to enter and exit the water easily.

Handling

It is very important that crocodiles are handled correctly, as this will help to reduce the likelihood of injury to both the handler and crocodile. Ensure that you have clean hands before handling any crocodile.

Also, consider the following:

- Take a moment to assess the situation and observe the behaviour of your crocodile. You may avoid an incident by recognising that your crocodile is stressed, anxious or poised to bite.
- Do not handle crocodiles any more than is absolutely necessary.

- The best way of holding a crocodile is by placing a firm grip around the neck, with a second hand under the body. Larger crocodiles may require this second hand to support the base of the tail.
- An elastic band may be placed around the snout of the crocodile to ensure that it doesn't bite while being handled. In this case, close the jaws by approaching the animal from behind and then secure the elastic band. Always remove the band before you return the animal to its enclosure.
- Always have another person present when handling crocodiles in case you get into trouble and require assistance.
- Always wash your hands after handling crocodiles.

Transportation

Crocodiles may only be moved from the permit holder's property under the auspices of an approved PWSNT permit. A *Keep Permit* does not allow the permit holder to transport crocodiles for display or exhibition without prior approval from the PWSNT.

Crocodiles must be transported inside secure, ventilated containers. Transport containers must clearly identify the number and species of crocodile contained within. The word 'CROCODILE' must also be displayed prominently on the container.

Ensure that all new crocodiles entering / exiting your collection are quarantined and the details of the supplier / receiver are recorded in the *Vertebrate Wildlife Records Book*, including the date, permit holder's name, address and permit number along with the crocodile's sex (if known) and length.

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