

Crocodiles vs Dinosaurs

Crocodiles, or “living dinosaurs” as they are often called, date back millions of years. They are thought to be closely related to dinosaurs, but what has helped crocodiles outlive these long-extinct reptiles? Crocodiles’ ability to adapt to changes in the environment helped them to survive conditions dinosaurs could not. For one, they adapt well to temperature change. In addition, they can go long periods of time without eating. Dinosaurs could not do that. When an asteroid hit the Earth, the temperatures in and out of the water dropped. Scientists think the dinosaurs were warm-blooded. Maintaining a high body temperature would have required a lot of energy. This energy came from food. But since everything was dying, there was not much to eat. The dinosaurs could not maintain their body temperature. This, combined with a lack of food, contributed to their end.

However, unlike dinosaurs, crocodiles are cold-blooded. They do not have to maintain a high body temperature. In addition, they can slow their bodily processes down. Their bodies can redirect blood flow away from non-essential organs and tissues. As a result, their bodies use less energy than the dinosaurs’ did. The crocodiles did not have to eat as much. In fact, some crocodiles can live for a year without a meal. At the time of the asteroid impact, this ability would have been priceless.



Crocodylia, a reptile order, consists of the “true crocodiles”, alligators, caimans, and gharials. Sometimes the word “crocodiles” is used to refer to all of them. However, the most accurate term is “crocodilians”.

The gharial is an Indian crocodilian which is the only surviving species of the family Gavialidae (a family of reptiles). Gharials are one of the most unique crocodilian species. Their appearance is quite unusual compared to other crocodilians. They are almost as large as Australian saltwater crocodiles. However, their diet differs because of one defining characteristic: their long, narrow snout. These creatures cannot eat large animals. They stick with small aquatic animals. But although they pose little threat to humans, the survival of gharials is under threat. They are extremely rare in the wild, and they may soon become extinct.

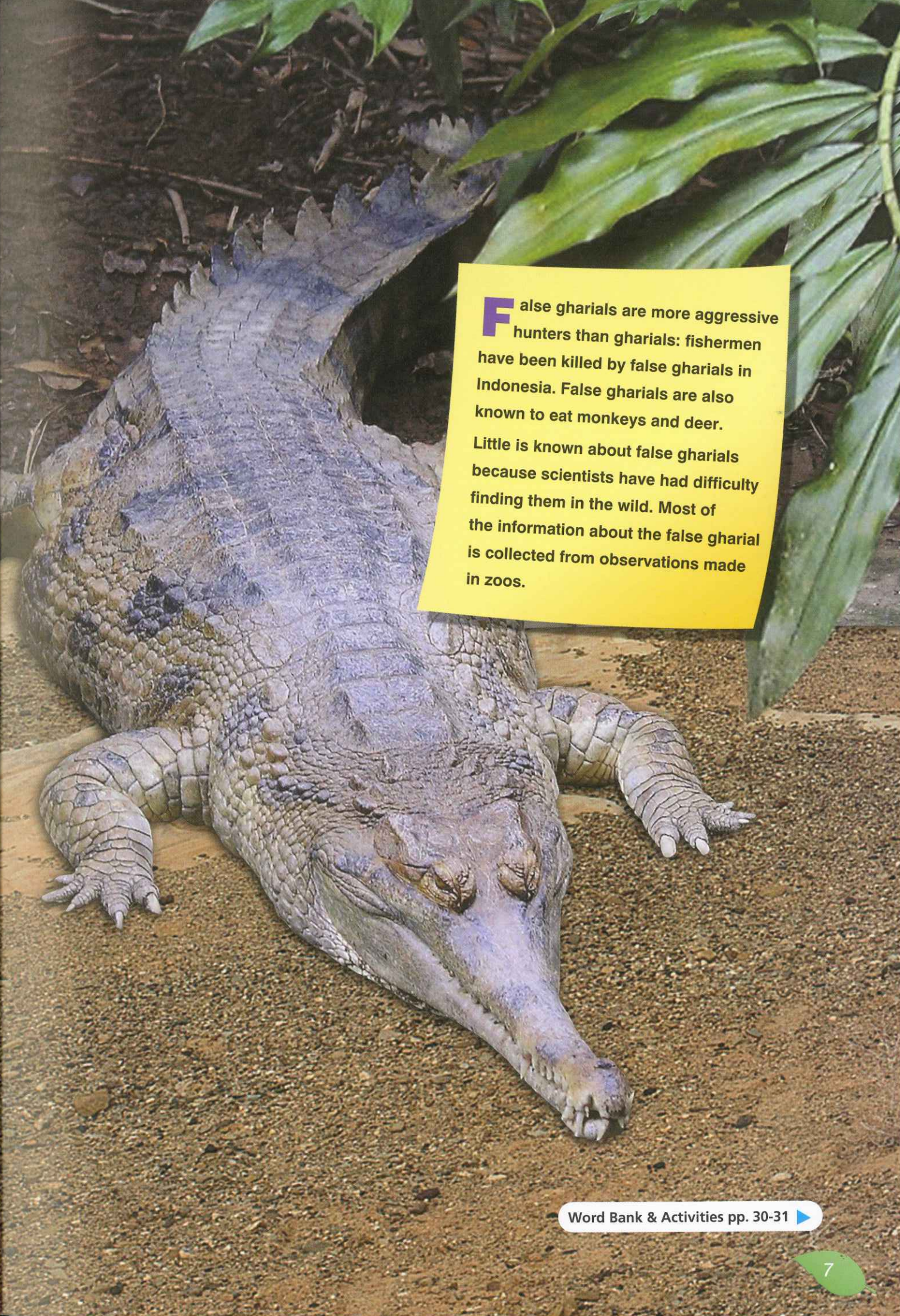
A Unique Feature

The gharial and the false gharial are unique among crocodilians. They both have long, narrow snouts, but that is where the similarities end. Aside from their snouts, these animals look and act quite differently. Yet, because of their snouts, they are often confused.

The gharial is the fastest and most agile of all the crocodilian species. However, that is only in the water – they cannot move very quickly on land. They are unable to fully lift their bodies, so they drag their lower bodies along the ground, or “belly-slide”.

The total gharial population has decreased by over 95% in the last sixty years.

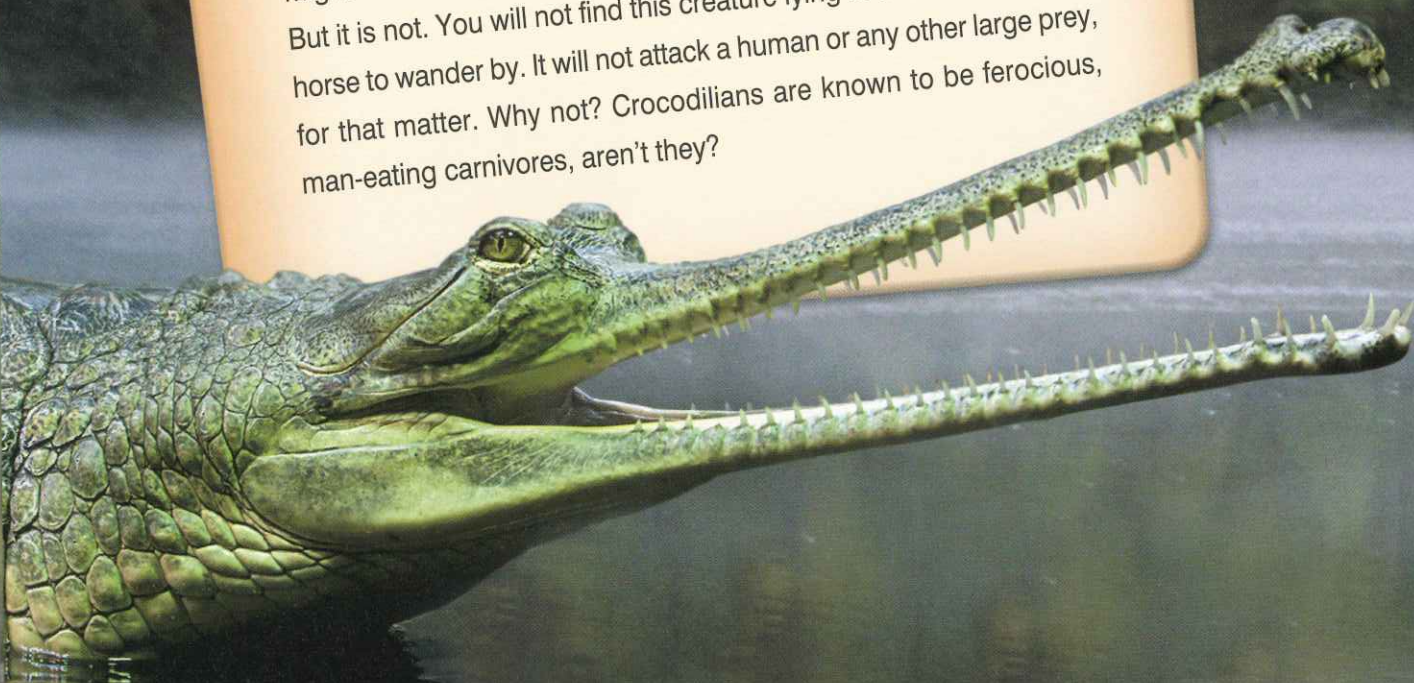
Gharials are often called by the nicknames “fish-eating crocodile” and “long-nosed crocodile”.



False gharials are more aggressive hunters than gharials: fishermen have been killed by false gharials in Indonesia. False gharials are also known to eat monkeys and deer. Little is known about false gharials because scientists have had difficulty finding them in the wild. Most of the information about the false gharial is collected from observations made in zoos.

Man-Eating Carnivore?

In the rivers of Nepal and India, you can find a massive crocodilian species—the gharial. It is second in size only to the Australian saltwater crocodile. The average adult male gharial measures between ten and twenty feet in length. Females are about eleven and a half feet long. Gharials can weigh up to 2,200 pounds, which is nearly 1000 kilos. They are massive creatures! At such a size, you might think the gharial is a fierce hunter like the saltwater crocodile. But it is not. You will not find this creature lying in wait for a cow or a horse to wander by. It will not attack a human or any other large prey, for that matter. Why not? Crocodilians are known to be ferocious, man-eating carnivores, aren't they?



Not this particular species.

Other crocodiles have something that gharials do not: the broad, V-shaped snout of the crocodile is perfect for catching both big and small animals. Because of the shape of their snout, the inside of their mouth is quite spacious. They can tear apart and swallow a large animal with ease. The V-shape also allows crocodiles to put a lot of power into their bite. Crushing bones is a piece of cake for them. These two features – a large mouth and a powerful bite – are essential for hunting large prey.

