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Dwarf Caimen (*Paleosuchus palpebrosus*) and (*Paleosuchus trigonatus*)

Living Dinosaurs

Dwarf caiman are among the smallest extant species of crocodylians worldwide. They may range in color from grayish, olive, chocolate brown, to olive brown, often with darker lateral banding and heavily ossified dorsal osteoderms and ventral scales. The heads of these crocodylian species are also very short, concave, and wedge shaped, with a high set skull and upturned snout as well as a pronounced overlapping of the upper jaw over the lower jaw. The Schneider's and Cuvier's species can most reliably be distinguished by the prominence of their dorsal osteoderms (which tend to be more pronounced in the Schneider's species).

There are two recognized species of dwarf caiman, the Cuvier's Dwarf Caiman (*Paleosuchus palpebrosus*) and the Smooth Fronted, or Schneider's Dwarf Caiman (*Paleosuchus trigonatus*). Crocodylians certainly should not be viewed as suitable pets for everyone, and few of the 23 recognized species can, or should be kept by hobbyists and pet owners. By virtue of their size and natural history, however, the dwarf caiman species are perhaps the most suitable crocodylian species to maintain in captivity for those seeking a crocodylian. Crocodylians are also a controlled, regulated, or prohibited species in many states. Both species of dwarf caiman are also currently listed as CITIES II and Low Risk, Least Concern (LR1c) under the IUCN Red List. This means a species is widely distributed with healthy populations and lack of significant population pressure. Always check any applicable federal, state, and local laws and ordinances that may pertain to the specific possession of this species. If provided the proper care, dwarf caimans can attain longevity of potentially 30 to 50 years or more. Crocodylians in general are long lived animals, and should not be seen as disposable.

Taxonomy-Schneider's and Cuvier's Dwarf Caimen

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum/Sub Phylum: Chordata/Vertebrata

Class: Reptilia

Superorder: Crocodylomorpha

Order: Crocodylia

Family: Alligatoridae

Genus: *Paleosuchus*

Species: *Paleosuchus palpebrosus** and *Paleosuchus trigonatus**

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

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Taxonomy-Spectacled and Yacare Caimen

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum/Sub Phylum: Chordata/Vertebrata

Class: Reptilia

Superorder: Crocodylomorpha

Order: Crocodylia

Family: Alligatoridae

Genus: Caiman

Species: *Caiman crocodilus** and *Caiman yacare**

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

Taxonomy-American Alligator

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum/Sub Phylum: Chordata/Vertebrata

Class: Reptilia

Superorder: Crocodylomorpha

Order: Crocodylia

Family: Alligatoridae

Genus: Alligator

Species: *Alligator mississippiensis**

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

Taxonomy-Nile Crocodile

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum/Sub Phylum: Chordata/Vertebrata

Class: Reptilia

Superorder: Crocodylomorpha

Order: Crocodylia

Family: Crocodylidae

Genus: Crocodylus

Species: *Crocodylus niloticus**

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

Taxonomy-Morelet's Crocodile

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum/Sub Phylum: Chordata/Vertebrata

Class: Reptilia

Superorder: Crocodylomorpha

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Order: Crocodylia

Family: Crocodylidae

Genus: *Crocodylus*

Species: *Crocodylus moreletii**

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, dwarf caimans can attain longevity of potentially 30 to 50 years or more. Other crocodylians may see longevity of up to 75 years. Crocodylians in general are long lived animals, and should not be seen as disposable.

Distribution and Habitat

Both species of dwarf caimans are widely ranging over much of northern to central South America including Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Surinam, and Venezuela. Within this broad range, they are found in forested, freshwater riverine and stream basins, flooded forests and wetlands, lakes, and temporary or isolated bodies of water. These species are also more tolerant of cooler water conditions, and can be more terrestrial than many other crocodylian species.

Conservation Status

American Alligator: IUCN Lower Risk (LR)/Least Concern (LC).

Dwarf Caiman: IUCN Lower Risk (LR)/Least Concern (LC).

Nile Crocodile: IUCN Lower Risk (LR)/Least Concern (LC).

Morelet's Crocodile: IUCN Lower Risk (LR)/Least Concern (LC).

Spectacled and Yacare Caiman: IUCN Lower Risk (LR)/Least Concern (LC).

Legal and Regulatory Status(*Subject to Change)

Caiman crocodilus apaporiensis are CITES Appendix I as of October 2017 and Endangered Species Act of 1974 listed species. *Crocodylus niloticus* are CITES Appendix I [Except the populations of Botswana, Egypt (subject to a zero quota for wild specimens traded for commercial purposes), Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania (subject to an annual export quota of no more than 1,600 wild specimens including hunting trophies, in addition to ranches specimens), Zambia and Zimbabwe, which are included in Appendix II] as of October 2017. *Crocodylus moreletii* are CITES Appendix I (Except the population of Belize, which is included in Appendix II with a zero quota for wild specimens traded for commercial purposes, and the population of Mexico, which is included in Appendix II) as of October 2017. All other Crocodylia species not included in Appendix I are CITES Appendix II as of October 2017.

Alligator mississippiensis, Caiman yacare, Caiman crocodilus fuscus (including Caiman crocodilus chiapasius), and Caiman crocodilus crocodilus are Endangered Species Act of 1974 listed species, special rules 17.42(a), 23.57.

Also consult with your local, municipal, and state ordinances and regulations for any ownership restrictions.

Experience Level Required

Advanced (for all crocodylian species).

Size

Hatchling dwarf caimans typically are 8 to 13 inches in length. Both species are sexually

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dimorphic as adults, with males being larger than females. *P. palpebrus*, or the Cuvier's dwarf caiman is the smaller of the two species, typically reaching 1.2 to 1.6 meters, or about 3 ½ to 5 ½ feet. *P. trignonatus*, the Schneider's Dwarf caiman is the larger of the two species, reaching up to 1.6 to 2.6 meters, or about 5 ½ to 8 ½ feet in length.

Housing and Enclosure

Housing and appropriate setups are perhaps the most challenging factor in maintaining any crocodylian species, and is a factor which greatly limits their suitability as pets. Many factors should be considered when it comes to housing these animals, including the species being maintained, their growth rates, the size and space required for an appropriately sized enclosure, cleaning and routine maintenance, and short term and long term housing costs. Crocodylians in general are semi-aquatic animals, and will require the appropriate amount of square footage in both water and dry land space for basking, thermoregulation, feeding, and foraging. The amount of water to land ratio provided in the enclosure will oftentimes vary considerably depending on the age, size, and species being maintained. The amount of water that should be provided, and the amount of time the animal will spend in it also will vary depending on many factors. In most crocodylian enclosures and setups, a water area should be wide and deep enough for the animal to enter and submerge itself completely in as well as be able to easily turn and move or swim within the area.

Most crocodylian species will require a water area of at least 70 to 80% of the enclosure, although as previously mentioned, the dwarf caimans can be more terrestrial, with an allocated amount of 50 to 60% of the enclosure being aquatic. The amount of time an animal spends in the water depends on several factors including the water's temperature (if the water is too cold, they will spend more time out of it basking and vice versa), whether a proper enclosure and setup with adequate hiding opportunities is provided, as well as the animal's safety and stress levels.

Although some crocodylians can tolerate saline water conditions, the dwarf caiman does not naturally occur in these conditions, and freshwater should be used for these species. At a minimum, the amount of heated land area provided should be enough to allow the animal to completely emerge from and bask out of the water, and be at least twice the animal's length in order to allow it to walk, easily turn around, or move about freely out of the water.

Crocodylians can be housed communally, or with certain other animals, but this of course depends on many factors include the relative sizes, species, and biology of the animals being considered. Generally, there should never be any significant size disparities between animals. Crocodylians can be quite cannibalistic, and will kill and/or eat significantly smaller turtles or other crocodylians (even if they are the same species) if perceived as food or in territorial disputes. Likewise, very large, predatory fish or turtles will eat a hatchling or small crocodylian if provided the opportunity. Even similar sized turtles or other species may still nip one another if adequate food and space for both are not provided. Generally, the safest and best practice is simply to house crocodylians separately from any other animals.

The enclosure itself should be secure, sturdily built or constructed, be adequately ventilated, and escape proof. As with other reptiles, crocodylians can be surprising escape artists if the enclosure is poorly designed. Most species of crocodylians, and especially the dwarf caiman species, are surprisingly good climbers, jumpers, and burrowers that can also easily burrow underneath barriers or fences if the enclosure's foundations are not deep or sturdily built enough. Any furnishings in the enclosure should also not be able to provide access for escape. The actual size of the enclosure depends on the age, size, and species being maintained. In general, however, an enclosure should be at a minimum 3 to 4 times the length of the animal in width and length. Some standards, such as those adopted in Germany (but not yet the U.S., although they may certainly be used and applied elsewhere), for example, indicate that a minimum amount of land space should be 3 times the animal's SVL (snout to vent length) wide and 4 times in length, and the minimum aquatic area at least 4 times the animal's SVL in width, 5 times their SVL in

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length, and at least a third of that animal's SVL in depth. Hatchling to juvenile crocodylians of most species, including the dwarf caimans, can be started off in an appropriately sized glass or wood sealed 20 to 40 gallon aquarium or terrarium, although they will soon outgrow these quarters. Glass aquariums and terrariums are almost never suitable enclosures or setups for maintaining sub-adult to adult crocodylians in, and they will instead require custom designed enclosures designed from plastic, wood, concrete, and/or fiberglass. Unfortunately, there are not currently any suitable commercially or readily available enclosures designed specifically for crocodylians as there are for snakes, lizards, and many other reptiles. However, some of the large prefabricated enclosures available in a variety of shapes, sizes, and dimensions such as galvanized steel or plastic troughs used in aquaculture and other agricultural uses can house at least hatchling to small sub-adults of some crocodylian species but are still not suitable enclosures for any larger animals. Substrates such as aquarium gravel or rocks can be used, but excess ingestion of them should be avoided or prevented. Many other furnishings in a crocodylian's enclosure may be destroyed or uprooted if they are not firmly planted or secured. Additional furnishings and décor can also be provided in the enclosure, but should be so that they are easily removed and replaced when cleaning or servicing an enclosure, and do not injure or impede either the animal in its enclosure, or access to or within the enclosure. As it can be imagined, crocodylians can also be very messy animals to maintain, and the water as well as enclosure should be kept clean and adequately filtrated for quality and clarity as much as possible. Regular maintenance should include daily spot cleaning and removing of any wastes or uneaten food, as well as using an appropriate filtration and pump system (there are many different products, options, and configurations available), aquarium gravel and under tank gravel filtration systems for sifting debris caught in the substrate, and other bacterial and aerobic systems that can assist in breaking down and dissipating harmful chemicals or sediments such as ammonia. Some testing kits are also available that can test and monitor water quality and ammonia levels as well. And while an effective filtration system(s) can be greatly beneficial in keeping an enclosure clean and sanitary, complete water changes will still need to be made at least once every week to two weeks (smaller enclosures can be easily changed daily) and the enclosure and any furnishings will need to be removed, scrubbed, cleaned, and disinfected with an antibacterial agent thoroughly. Depending on the enclosure and the setup, larger enclosures can be equipped with a siphoning and/or drainage system to more easily change and replace the water regularly. The overall frequency of cleaning an enclosure depends on the type and strength of filtration system being used, the animal's feeding regime, and how often spot cleaning and other maintenance is performed. In addition, cleaning to a large extent, is dependent on the particular setup and circumstances.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

Temperature and heating wise, most crocodylians are tropical to sub-tropical species, requiring moderate to higher levels of humidity. Although there is some variability in the preferred body temperatures between different species (some can tolerate cooler conditions), all species generally have the same or very similar ranges of 29 to 34 degrees C (or about 84 to 94 degrees F). Therefore, providing an ambient environment that allows these animals to bask in order to reach and maintain these body temperatures is most recommended. Basking temperatures can be allowed to reach up to 97 degrees F as long as a thermal gradient in the enclosure is provided and the animal has the opportunity to cool down or thermoregulate. Water temperatures for most species can be maintained and monitored at around 80 to 88 degrees F, although many of the caiman species will usually be able to tolerate cooler or otherwise fluctuating water temperatures. Water and ambient temperatures however, should not be allowed to significantly deviate from these ranges, however, which may result in the animal overheating, becoming stressed, or otherwise developing a compromised immune system. Correctly using a submersible water heater of appropriate wattage along with a thermostat outside of the enclosure to prevent

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ingestion or possibly electrocution of the animal is typically the best way of maintaining suitable water temperatures.

The ambient and basking temperatures and areas can be maintained using an appropriate wattage UV-A/UV-B overhead incandescent bulb(s) along with the use of a thermostat as well. Dwarf caiman in particular though are largely nocturnal, and their light-cycle, UVA/UVB, and vitamin D3 requirements with respect to lighting and heating are not yet fully understood, although providing these may still be beneficial. Other heating elements that can be used include ceramic heat emitters, nighttime red lights, or radiant heat panels as well (which can often heat a larger area/enclosure). Direct contact should be prevented between the heating element and the animal to avoid the potential for thermal burns or other injuries. Most crocodilians also will require a photoperiod, or day/night cycle of 10 to 14 hours using appropriate wattage incandescent and/or florescent (which do not generate much heat) lights, or natural light in order to do well. More specific lighting, heating, and humidity product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Carnivorous; All species of crocodilians, both in the wild and in captivity are carnivorous, generally feeding upon fish, invertebrates, other smaller reptiles and amphibians, birds, small to large mammals, and carrion. Both species of dwarf caiman in the wild will feed upon a variety of aquatic and terrestrial invertebrates (including crustaceans, insects, and mollusks), fish, smaller reptiles and amphibians, and small mammals. The diet of these species is largely dependent on the age, size, food availability, and habitat. Caiman and other crocodilians are also known to jump or leap from the water to capture prey. The feeding behavior of crocodilians will vary depending on the age, size, and species, but feeding any species in captivity in general should obviously entail common sense in order to prevent a feeding related bite. Offering food via tongs, forceps, or means other than by hand are generally most recommended when safely feeding and working around these animals. It is also undesirable if a caiman or other crocodilian comes to associate human hands with food when entering the enclosure for any other reason. In captivity, caiman and other crocodilian species are generally opportunistic eaters, and will accept a wide variety of live or pre-killed prey items. However, they must also require a correct, balanced diet including proteins, calcium, and other valuable nutrients that can be best derived from feeding whole prey items (such as feeder insects, or rodents). While strips of lean meat such as pork, chicken, and beef as well as other incomplete dietary items can be ok to feed to your crocodilian as part of a varied and balanced diet, they should not be given as a primary food source since they are not nutritionally complete (and dietary deficiencies such as calcium deficiencies can occur as a result). Feeder items such as feeder fish can often be used, but some choices in fish are better than others in terms of their nutritional content. Feeding frozen/thawed fish to crocodilians should be done very sparingly, if at all in order to prevent thiaminase (which destroys vitamin B1), and thus vitamin B1 supplements should be given if using any frozen fish. Another vitamin deficiency to remain aware of in high fish diets is vitamin E deficiency, or steatitis. Many types of appropriately sized feeder insects including crickets, roaches, and others can also be given, but must be gut loaded and/or dusted with calcium and vitamin D3 to increase their nutritional value (and must also be chemical and pesticide free). Frozen & thawed rodents (such as rats and mice) will also be eaten as well. In most cases, crocodilians will accept pre-killed rodents, which do not have the potential of injuring or even killing your crocodilian. Other prey items that can be given can include snails, worms, crayfish, shrimp, and other options. Very young animals can also be given chopped or minced food items to assist in their digestion, but can be messy and require more frequent cleaning. Some commercially available fish/turtle/reptile pellets and diets are also available options, but care should be taken to read their nutritional contents when used. Overall, any foods given should not have been potentially exposed to chemicals or pesticides, have a hard, chitinous exoskeleton that can impede digestion, free of

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parasites, or be toxic.

Feeding amount and frequency will often depend on the age, size, and species of the animal. As young hatchlings, they should typically be fed on a more frequent schedule of once every two days. As they become older, most crocodylians can be fed approximately two to three times per week. Crocodylians in captivity can however be very susceptible to overfeeding and obesity (which lead to other longer term health issues), and therefore, they should not be overfed. Many crocodylians can also be occasionally seen ingesting small stones or other substrate. This is a natural behavior of crocodylians in the wild known as “geophagy”. This is in some ways similar to habits seen in birds with crops. The purpose for the animal engaging in this behavior is to assist in their digestive processes to break food down over longer periods of time. While this may be a natural behavior, it should be monitored in captivity to ensure that the animal is not harmed or otherwise ingests inappropriate items that can cause more serious health related issues. More specific dietary and supplementary product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one’s needs, as well as those of one’s animals can be given as well.

Handling

Crocodylians in general are very seldom the first animals that come to mind for most when it comes to handling and handle ability. For reasons that should be obvious, they can be potentially dangerous animals to handle and work with if proper safety and handling protocols are not followed and practiced. Crocodylians are animals that should not be underestimated when it comes to their speed and strength, as they can be very strong and powerful animals. Even a small crocodylian at 2 (two) feet or less has the potential of inflicting a nasty bite requiring stitches and/or medical attention. As such, a disclaimer should be included here that handling, or attempting to handle any crocodylian species should not be attempted by those inexperienced and unfamiliar in doing so. These animals do not make suitable pets for all but the most dedicated and experienced facilities and few private keepers and hobbyists. There is also some variability in the dispositions of these animals depending on their age, size, species of crocodylian, and even among individual animals. American alligators (*Alligator mississippiensis*), for example, tend to be the most docile crocodylian species at least relatively speaking, but are also a large species that still can be quite difficult and potentially dangerous to handle, particularly for one person. While some of the dwarf caimans can become somewhat tame and handleable, they are a shy and more secretive species and reports of their dispositions and temperaments vary, and as stated previously, each animal is an individual.

There is also the question of whether these animals should be handled. This depends largely upon the specific purpose for keeping the animal. If an animal is being maintained primarily for purposes of display or exhibition, then handling is typically less of a priority. If one does choose to handle their animal, then it should be initiated at as young and early of a stage as possible. The best likelihood of ending up with a relatively tame animal, or at least one that is otherwise accustomed to handling, being around people, and routine activities such as feeding and cage cleaning is to start at the hatchling stage. Larger and/or older animals tend to be far more difficult, if not impossible to safely be acclimated to handling if not initiated previously. Many juvenile and hatchling crocodylian species may emit a bark-like “yelp” when handled or distressed. This is a natural vocalization intended as an alert or warning to a would be parent animal that the young animal is in distress.

The best methods for handling these animals of course depends on the size of the animal. Juvenile and hatchling animals should be handled for at least several minutes each day, although they should not be over-handled in order to prevent undue stress to the animal. Hatchlings can be gently and carefully scooped up from underneath and be gently restrained in the palm of the hand. It is important to not to overly restrain an animal in order to prevent further stress and possible injury to either the handler or animal. If the hatchling attempts to bite, further restraint can be made with the fore finger and thumb over the animal’s neck and shoulders. Relatively

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small animals up to about 2 to 3 feet in length can usually be handled safely using one fore arm to adequately support the animal's body, and the tail pinned between the handler's body and arm to prevent excess movement. Older or slightly larger animals that cannot be held using one hand and arm can be held with two hands, one securely behind the neck, and other around the pelvic girdle and hind limbs or base of the tail. It is never advisable to lift or attempt to handle a crocodylian by their tail alone, for they are also very flexible animals that can very easily and quickly turn around to bite.

The use of gloves to handle crocodylians? Work gloves can be used to handle or restrain hatchling and smaller crocodylian specimens if one chooses to use them, but they can oftentimes reduce dexterity and precision, particularly when gentler handling is required. Furthermore, gloves will not withstand or protect one from the bite of larger and more powerful animals that are substantially larger than 2 or 3 feet in size or length.

When it comes to animals that are four (4) to five (5) feet or larger, handling becomes much more impractical in the context of picking them up. Most crocodylians at or exceeding this size range are too large, heavy, and/or potentially dangerous to handle alone or without the assistance of at minimum a second person on hand. Larger and older animals should obviously be approached with safety in mind using a specifically designed safety and capture noose or catch pole to first secure the animal's head and jaws while a second or even third person secures or restrains the animal. In order to coax an animal to move or be transferred, the use of a suitable object, such as a broom, long wooden pole, wooden shield, or other portable barrier. These devices should not be overly hard in order to prevent tooth and mouth injuries should the animal bite down on them. Crocodylians are generally known for having among the most powerful downward bites among animals. However, their same musculature required to open their jaws is very weak and can usually be easily held shut using a proper device including but not limited to an elastic band or adequate strength, masking or duct tape, a soft rope or twine, or other fabric that is not abrasive or harms the animal particularly when removing it from the animal. It is also important to remember that when securing the animal's jaws, that their nostrils at the tip of the snout are not covered, which could otherwise inhibit the animal's breathing. There are overall many different capture and restraint techniques that can be employed on mid-sized to larger crocodylians that are beyond the scope of this care sheet. In order to learn more about these, it is always strongly encouraged to anyone with an interest in responsibly keeping these animals to not only read and consult further sources of information, but, more importantly, gain additional hands on first experience from a qualified and well versed zoological facility, veterinarian, experienced private keeper, or other individual or organization with similar, comparable knowledge and experience.

****Also be sure to practice basic cleanliness and hygiene associated with proper husbandry after touching or handling any animals or animal enclosures to prevent the possibility of contracting salmonellosis or any other zoonotic pathogens****

Other Commonly Kept Crocodylian Species for Which this Care Sheet Applies To

Of the 23 recognized crocodylian species found worldwide, relatively few other species besides the dwarf caiman species are commonly to occasionally kept or available in public and private herpetoculture, most of which are other small to mid-sized species. Many species have higher CITES and IUCN Red List conservation rankings that generally prohibit or greatly restrict their possession, transport, and commerce in the United States and worldwide, and are also large and/or very defensive species that all greatly limit their suitability to maintain in captivity. Apart from the size differences and associated space and enclosure size requirements between these different species, care and husbandry for most other crocodylian species is generally, for the most part, similar to the above and can be applied to other species as well. This is a list and short overview of each other species commonly maintained in captivity.

American Alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*): American alligators are a large crocodylian species indigenous to the swamps, marshes, flooded wetlands, lakes, rivers, ponds, reservoirs, and coastal tidal areas of the Southeastern United States. They are perhaps the most docile crocodylian species, relatively speaking, but also reach very large sizes, making them still difficult and potentially dangerous to handle, which greatly limits their long term suitability for all but the most dedicated reptile keepers and facilities. As adults, they are sexually dimorphic, with males typically reaching about 4 to 5 meters in length (or about 12 to 16 feet), and females generally being 3 meters or less (about 8 to 9 feet in length). The snout is characteristically broad and rounded, with upper jaw teeth being predominately visible when the mouth is closed, and ground color ranging from blackish, olive, to olive gray with low to moderate ossified dorsal scutes. Hatchling, juvenile, and younger animals are generally similar in color, but have more prominent yellowish to cream colored banding. Alligators are widely distributed over most of their range, and are listed as a CITES II, Low Risk/Least Concern species under the IUCN Red List.

Spectacled/Common Caiman (*Caiman crocodilus*): The Spectacled, or common caiman, is a very adaptable and widely ranging mid-sized crocodylian species indigenous to the seasonally flooded wetlands, riverine systems, lakes, ponds, streams, and other wetlands/bodies of water over much of Central and northern to central South America. Juveniles and adults of this species can range in color from yellowish, to pale or darker olive to olive yellow with darker spots and banding present. The eyelids are heavily ossified in this species, and there is a characteristic bony ridge or “spectacle” between the eyes on top of their head. Spectacled caiman usually reach 2 to 2 ½ meters in length (or about 5 to 8 ½ feet), although occasional specimens can reach a maximum of 3 meters (or about 9 ½ feet). Spectacled caiman are listed as a CITES II, Low Risk/Least Concern animal that is still very widely distributed and can still occur in high densities at certain times of the year. Spectacled caiman were formerly a very commonly kept alternative crocodylian species to American alligators, and although their popularity and prevalence have declined in more contemporary favor of the dwarf caiman species (*Paleosuchus spp.*), they are still somewhat available. As captives, spectacled caiman are often shy and reclusive as hatchlings, and can be a defensive and difficult to handle species as adults.

Yacare Caiman (*Caiman yacare*): The Yacare caiman is another small to mid-sized crocodylian species that has perhaps the southernmost range of the caiman species, being found in many of the same or similar aquatic to semi aquatic habitats as the Spectacled caiman in northern Argentina, southern Brazil and Bolivia, and Paraguay. Yacare caiman generally reach 1 to 2 ½ meters in length (or about 3 ½ to 8 ½ feet). Yacare caiman are listed as a CITES II, Low Risk/Least Concern animal that has historically experienced some levels of depletion, but is still very widely distributed and can still occur in high densities at certain times of the year. Appearance is largely similar to the spectacled caiman, although this species tends to be a darker olive to olive brown in color, with more distinct black and white banding on the lower jaws. This species is also sometimes hybridized with the spectacled caiman in captivity to produce the **Diamond Caiman** as well, which is not a pure species.

Morelet's Crocodile (*Crocodylus moreletti*): The Morelet's crocodile is a mid-sized crocodylian species indigenous to the freshwater swamps, marshes, forested wetlands, and sometimes brackish water areas of Belize, Guatemala, and portions of Mexico in Central America. Morelet's crocodiles are listed as a CITES I, IUCN Red List Low Risk but Conservation Dependent species, with recent survey data indicating moderate densities of populations still being found over most of their historic distribution. Morelet's crocodiles have a fairly broad snout for a crocodile species, and can range in color from a moderate to darker gray, to grayish brown with darker banding and stripes present along the body and tail. This species can also be

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identified and distinguished from similar appearing crocodylian species by the heavy scalation on the neck, and silver-brown irises. This species usually reaches up to 3 meters, or 8 to 9 ½ feet in length, and some specimens can become relatively docile in captivity for a *Crocodylus* species.

Nile Crocodile (*Crocodylus niloticus*): The Nile crocodile is a large crocodylian species that is widely ranging over much of Northeastern to the Congo and sub Saharan regions of Africa, where they occur in swamplands, marshes, rivers, lakes, and other wetlands and sometimes brackish water swamps and wetlands. Nile crocodiles are listed as a CITES I animal except 1. Botswana, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe (Appendix II ranching); 2. Madagascar, Uganda (Appendix II annual quota). They are also a Low Risk/Least Concern species under the IUCN Red List with a wide distribution and overall healthy populations in most areas. Coloration of this crocodylian species can vary considerably depending on their range and subspecies, but most are generally a dark grayish to olive brown with darker blotches and cross banding along the body and tail that become more obscured with age. The snout is fairly long, slender, and typical of a crocodile/*Crocodylus* species. Nile crocodiles can range in size from 4 to 5 meters on average (or about 13 ½ to 16 ½ feet), with animals up to 6 meters (or about 19 ½ feet) being rare. Despite being a large crocodylian species with a typically less pleasant and more defensive disposition, it is still found within the trade, although is an unsuitable long term choice for all but the most dedicated keepers and other facilities.

Contact

Authored by Eric Roscoe. For any additional questions, comments, and/or concerns regarding this animal, group of animals, or this care sheet, please email and contact the Madison Area Herpetological Society at info@madisonherps.org

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