

Gharial

Scientific Name: *Gavialis gangeticus*

Class: Reptilia

Order: Crocodylia

Family: Gavialidae



One of the longest crocodylians. Adult males can reach 16 to 20 feet. Females are smaller, reaching 13 feet. Weight averages 200 to 500 lbs., but can be up to 1,000 lbs. Gharials have slender, elongated snouts. In mature males the snout is tipped with a large bulbous mass known as the ghara, after the Indian word for “pot”, which it resembles. The ghara’s function is unknown but is thought to produce a loud buzzing noise when vocalizing to attract females. The jaws are equipped with sharp pointed teeth. The hide is tough, and is sought after by hunters.

Range

India, Nepal, Pakistan

Habitat

Fast rivers with deep pools and sandy or muddy banks

Gestation

Incubation: 60-90 days

Litter

Clutch: 35-60 eggs

Behavior

They are clumsy on land, as their leg musculature doesn’t allow them to raise their body or tail off the ground. They can, however, belly-slide quickly if need be. They are the most aquatic member of the order, and leave the water only to bask or nest, usually on a sandy riverbank. They spend much of the time lying just under the surface of the water, with only the eyes and nostrils exposed. Despite their enormous size, they tend to avoid rather than attack people. The long and narrow jaws aren’t strong enough to grasp and tear apart large prey as other crocodiles do for food.

Reproduction

Females reach sexual maturity at about 9 feet in length, and usually over 10 years of age. Males guard a harem of several females. Mating period occurs for 2 months during November, December and January. Nesting is in March, April and May (the dry season), when hole nests are dug into sand banks. The eggs are deposited into the hole before it is covered carefully. Gharial eggs are the largest of any crocodylian species, weighing on average 5.6 ounces. After the incubation period of 60 to 90 days juveniles emerge. The female has not been observed assisting the hatchlings to the water, as in other crocodylian species. However, the young are protected around the nesting area after hatching.

Wild Diet

Invertebrates, frogs, fish