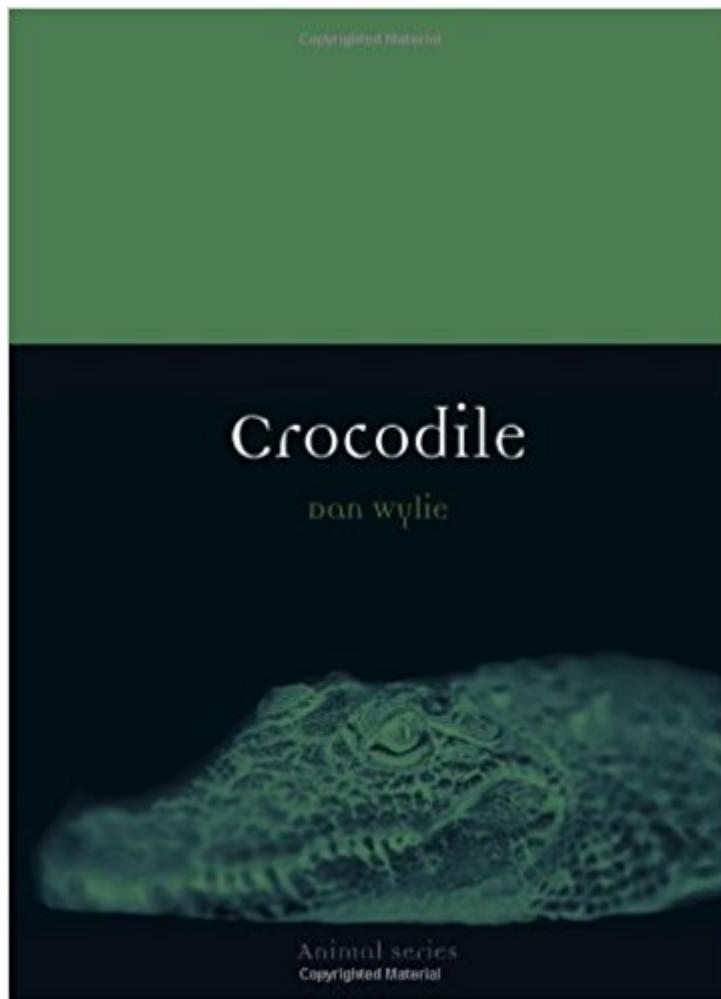


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Crocodile (Animal)



Synopsis

“Tick, tock, tick, tock.” Thanks to Peter Pan, this sound, if heard near water, means run: a hungry crocodile is on its way. J. M. Barrie isn’t fully to blame for spreading the word that crocodiles are our enemies, or at least the enemies of one-handed pirates. Innumerable songs, stories, and legends have characterized these reptiles as a symbol of pitiless predation and insatiable appetite. Tracking twenty-three crocodilian species from India and Egypt to Africa, Australia, and beyond, *Crocodile* advocates that we do a complete one-eighty in our views of these magnificent creatures. Dan Wylie traces the crocodile in myth, art, and literature, demonstrating that though we commonly associate the reptiles with ferocity and deceit, they have also often been respected and revered in human history. Discussing how crocodiles were all but wiped out in the middle of the twentieth century by hunters and skin traders and are now making a comeback, he reveals that, as apex predators, they are today an increasingly important indicator of the health of an ecosystem and may outlive humans like they did dinosaurs. Presenting a concise, cogent case for why we should respect these fearsome animals, this beautifully illustrated volume is a tribute to one of the world’s ultimate survivors.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Dan Wylie is professor of English at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa. He is the author of *Elephant* (2008), also published by Reaktion Books.

This is another Reaktion Books "Animal" series. It is one of the better of the series. It covers other crocodilians (that's a word for an offbeat poet somewhere!), including caimans and alligators. This is not a book of natural history or a species guide. It is more or less a consideration of the idea of crocodile. The book includes a useful section on natural history that makes clear the relationships among the various species. It also includes sections on the crocodile in history, art and literature, as well as crocodile products, such as leather. The book has some fascinating details. According to the book, crocodiles have quite powerful antibiotic peptides in their bloodstream, called "crocodillin" that accounts for how crocodile injuries in polluted waters heal quickly--this seems to be of considerable interest to human medicine. Another is truly bizarre: around 1900 a German chromolithograph somehow became popular in what is now Nigeria, and says the author, is the probable origin of the widespread African tradition of Mama Wata. And who knew that crocodiles have excellent hearing or pits in the skin extremely sensitive to motion in water? I had thought these animals had a brain the size of a walnut and were, well, stupid. I was wrong. It's worth remembering that crocodiles are a deadly danger in much of Africa and a few places elsewhere. They kill hundreds of people a year, below the radar of Western news outlets that might now and then notice a death in Australia due to the famous saltwater crocs. This is a quick, pleasant, informative read.

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