**My favourite animal**

When you ask someone what their favourite animal is, usually it will be a majestic warm-blooded creature, such as an elephant, lion, tiger, eagle or peacock. To me, my favourite animal is also majestic in its own special way, but many people may despise it. My favourite animal is the crocodile!

I admire crocodiles because they look just like dinosaurs. In fact, they did live with dinosaurs and have been around longer than dinosaurs. The largest crocodile that ever lived was Sarcosuchus. It was as long as a school bus and it could kill and eat dinosaurs. I wish it was still alive today!

Fortunately, there are many other crocodile species alive today. Many wonderful varieties exist. Some crocodiles are very long and have narrow snouts, while others are small and have short, stubby snouts. The narrow snouts of some crocodiles, such as the Australian Freshwater Crocodile or African Slender-snouted Crocodile, allow them to catch fish more easily. West African Dwarf Crocodiles grow to no more than 2 m, and they have heavily armoured backs. Sadly, the Dwarf Crocodile is endangered.

Another reason why I love crocodiles is that the females are actually very good mothers. A female crocodile would defend her nest with her life against anything or anyone who wanted to steal her eggs. When the female’s babies hatch from their eggs, she digs them out of the nest with her claws and carries them to the water in her mouth without hurting them! Many people can’t imagine that scaly animals can be cute, but baby crocodiles are definitely very cute. The hatchlings have many enemies such as herons, snakes, large crabs, carnivorous fish and other crocodiles. The mother will kill or chase off any creature who dares to come close to her offspring. Most reptiles don’t even protect their eggs, and crocodiles are the only reptiles that protect their offspring once they have hatched.

The most impressive crocodiles are the Nile Crocodile and the Saltwater Crocodile. Nile Crocodiles come from Africa and eat buffalo, zebra, fish …and people. Sometimes Nile Crocodiles will sit in a flowing stream with their mouths open and wait for a fish to drop in. Saltwater Crocodiles are the largest reptiles in the world and live in the Northern parts of Australia. Cassius, the world’s largest crocodile in captivity, is a Saltwater Crocodile of 5.48 m long and is about 100 years old, but some can grow to more than 7 m!

Crocodiles are experts when it comes to hunting. As soon as they hatch, baby crocodiles already know how to bite and catch their prey all by themselves. In the beginning they eat insects, spiders, frogs and small fish. As they grow older, they start to eat birds, mammals and bigger fish. They ambush their prey at the water’s edge. When stalking their prey, only their eyes, nostrils and ears are above the surface. Suddenly, they grab their prey and drag them into the water to drown them. This is why crocodiles are so dangerous – you don’t see them coming. It’s always the one you can’t see that gets you!

Many crocodiles are endangered today because people destroy their habitat and hunt them for sport or out of fear. Yet they help clean our riverways by eating dead animals and keep herbivore and fish populations under control. Crocodiles deserve more respect than what most people give them.