

Feral February Episode 13 – The ghastly gharial

Description

Throughout the month of February, which I am calling “Feral February,” I am going to do something a little bit different – I’m going to create a series of theme posts every week day about my favourite things in the world: Animals.

Today’s animal is the gharial.

Crocodiles and alligators are known all over the world as some of the largest reptiles currently on the planet, but the gharial, a close relative of crocodiles and alligators, is one of the biggest.



A gharial. Photo courtesy of Michel Gunther/Biosphoto and ARKive. [Source](#).

The gharial, found in northern India, is an extremely large and slender crocodile relative that is instantly recognizable thanks to its extremely unusual and narrow snout, ideally suited for catching fast-moving fish. They do so by silently waiting in the water for fish to swim by, then whipping their snout sideways to catch the fish in their very sharp teeth, before swallowing whole and head-first.

An adult gharial can reach up to 23 feet long (or 7 metres), but unlike its crocodile and alligator relatives, it has webbed feet and its legs are relatively weak. In fact, adult gharials are unable to raise their body above the ground on land.

The gharial is currently listed as critically endangered primarily due to hunting, fishing and habitat loss due to construction in its native range. The International Union for Conservation of Nature estimates that there has been a 96 – 98 percent decrease in the gharial population since the 1940s, with an estimated number of less than 235 individuals recorded in 2006.

Daily dose of trivia:

Male gharials have a large bulbous growth at the end of their nose, presumably used to attract females during the mating season by producing sounds and bubbles. The name, gharial, is a derivation of the Indian word “ghara,” which means pot, and is what the bulbous growth resembles.

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