

CROCODILUS.

Crocodilus, auct.

1. ***Crocodilus americanus***, Schneid.

The American Crocodile has a most extensive geographical distribution. It is found in the large West-Indian Islands, and is very common on the Atlantic side of Mexico and Central America*; on the Pacific side it extends southwards to Ecuador, whence specimens were brought by Mr. Fraser. Naturally, a species of so wide a range exhibits no inconsiderable amount of variation, especially in the comparative length of the snout, in the more or less regular arrangement of the lateral dorsal scutes, in the prominence of the keels of the scutes, and in the development (as regards number and size) of the scutes protecting the neck. The last of these characters is the least trustworthy of all, and therefore I am not prepared to admit the species named *Crocodilus mexicanus* by Bocourt. The variations in the width of the skull are all the more perplexing, as evidently a great change takes place in this respect during the growth of the individual. From specimens less than one foot in length little information is to be gained, but as they grow the snout is more produced and becomes comparatively narrow. This goes on until they have attained a length of five or six feet. About that period the growth of bone is slower in the longitudinal axis of the jaw than in the transverse, and the jaws increase in width as the animal becomes older. It is therefore necessary in the utilization of this character to compare specimens of the same size and presumably of the same age.

Induced by the labours of the French naturalists who distinguished several species of the Central-American Crocodile, I re-examined a very large series (34 specimens), and came to the conclusion that at least two forms, a long-snouted and a broad-snouted, could be distinguished, although even these two forms cannot be sharply defined, all having, besides, one important character in common by which the American Crocodile can always be recognized, namely, the longitudinal elevation of bone along the fronto-nasal region.

For the long-snouted form the subspecific term of *acutus*, and for the broad-snouted that of *moreletii*† may be chosen, and it may be useful to indicate in the accompanying table the amount of variation which attains in each of these two forms.

* Wyman (Sill. Journ. vol. 49, 1870, p. 105) records the occurrence of *Crocodilus acutus* on the coast of Florida, and describes a skull $18\frac{1}{4}$ inches long, comparing it with one of similar size from South America. As the Floridan skull is much narrower than any I have examined of *C. acutus*, and resembles in this respect the Crocodile of the Orinoco, I have some hesitation in referring the Floridan Crocodile to *C. acutus*.

† Wiegmann, Herpetol. Mex. p. 22, and Strauch, Syn. Crocodil. p. 41, maintain that *Crocodilus rhombifer* is common in Mexico and other parts of Central America. This statement rests evidently on a confusion of the Cuban species with the broad-snouted form of *C. americanus*. As far as I have been able to ascertain, the *C. rhombifer* of Cuba is peculiar to that island. It lacks the longitudinal rise of the fronto-nasal region, and the dorsal scutes form four regular longitudinal series besides one or two irregular lateral rows. Duméril's statement as to the shortness of the web between the outer hind toes in Cuban specimens, I am unable to confirm; this membrane shrinks in dry specimens, but in our Cuban Crocodiles it is as much developed as in *C. acutus*, or nearly so. Finally, I may remark that the skull on which Cuvier founded *C. rhombifer* may prove to be nothing but a short-snouted *C. americanus*.