

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC
KIDS

CHAPTERS

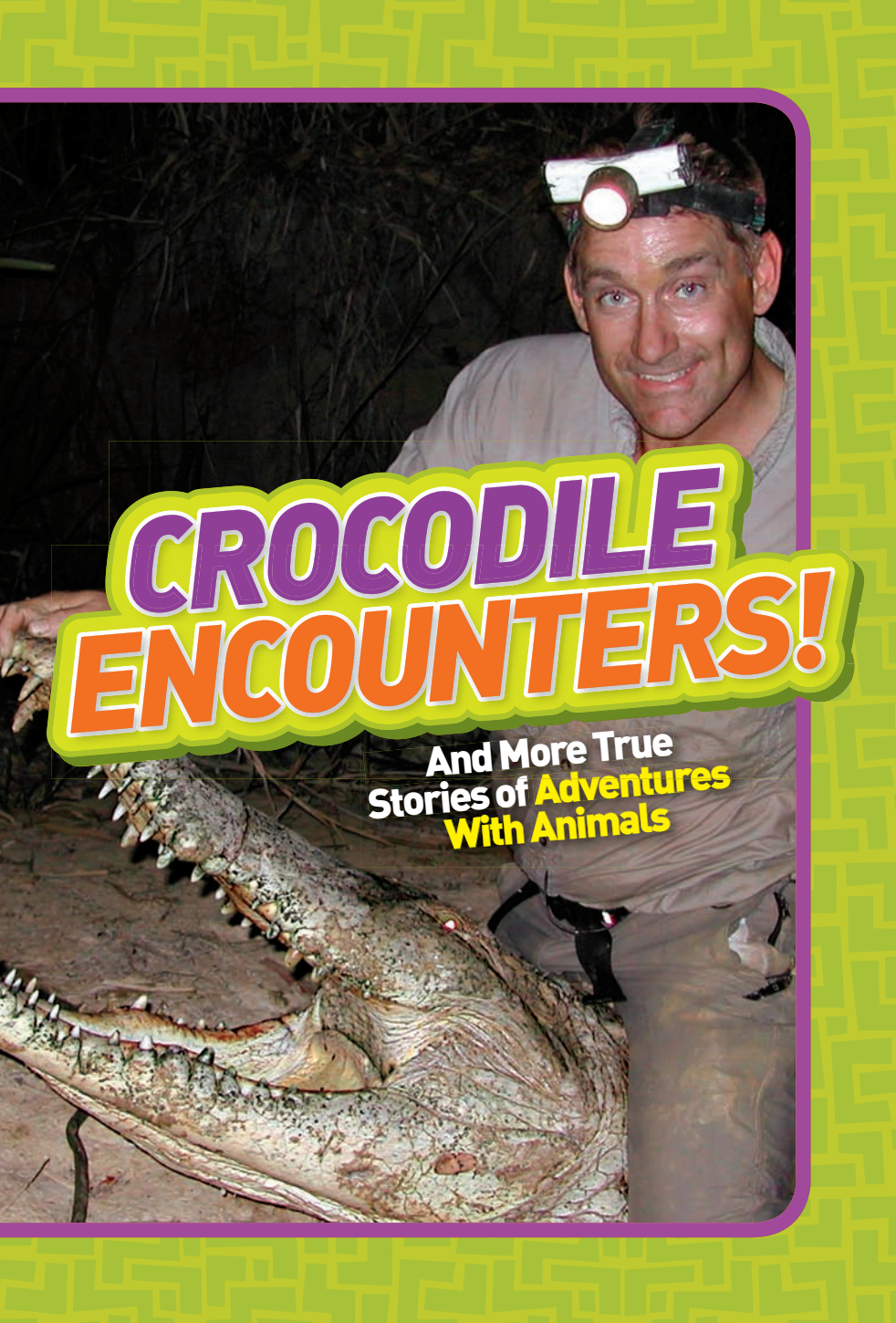
CROCODILE ENCOUNTERS!

**And More True Stories of
Adventures With Animals**



By Brady Barr With Kathleen Weidner Zoehfeld

NATIONAL
GEOGRAPHIC



CROCODILE ENCOUNTERS!

And More True
Stories of **Adventures**
With **Animals**

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That's me, zoologist Brady Barr, dressed in a special crocodile suit. My disguise let me get close to the crocs and collect information.



UNDERCOVER CROC

My team and I are ready for our dangerous mission in Tanzania.



Chapter 1

Croc DISGUISE

Hi, my name is Brady Barr, and I'm a zoologist. That means I study animals. I've studied all kinds of animals in about 70 countries on Earth. But of all the animals I've worked with, crocodiles are my favorite.

There are 23 different types, or species, of crocodilians (sounds like krah-koh-DIL-ee-uhns). I've had the chance to see them all in the

wild. I've been up close to the wide-snouted alligators and caimans (sounds like KAY-mens). I've been nose-to-nose with the narrow-jawed crocodiles. And I've even studied the weird and wonderful gharial (sounds like GAR-ree-uhl).

Sometimes I have to catch wild crocodiles for my work. For some studies, my team and I need to weigh and measure crocs. For other studies, we need to attach high-tech devices to the crocs. These devices help us keep track of the crocs, or they record information about changes in the areas where the crocs live.

The number of people on Earth is growing every year. More humans on the planet means people need more space. People are moving into areas that were

once the wild homes, or habitats, of crocs. With their habitats shrinking, many species of crocodilians are dying out. When a species is dying out, we say it is an endangered species.

The more we know about endangered species and what they need, the better we can help them. But catching wild crocs is a dangerous job—for me and for the crocs!

To catch a croc, I usually have to snare it with a rope. Then I wrestle it until it is very tired. I jump onto its back and tie its jaws shut so it can't bite. Then I tie its legs. That's a lot easier said than done!

Even a tired crocodile is very strong. Catching one can turn dangerous quickly. Crocodiles are not used to having people jump on their backs. It is strange for them.

Endangered Crocs

About one-third of all croc species are endangered. In fact, many are among the most endangered animals on the planet. The Philippine crocodile used to live in lakes and rivers throughout the Philippines (sounds like FILL-ih-peens). Today it is only found in a few areas. As the number of humans has grown, more and more of its wild habitat has been turned into farmland.

Loss of habitat has driven the Philippine crocodile almost to extinction. Once a species is extinct, it's gone forever.



That's why I am always looking for better ways to handle the crocs and get the information we need.

We know that crocodiles are calmer around other crocs than around humans. If only another croc could find out what we need to know. Then it wouldn't be so hard on the animal we want to study.

Well, on a trip to Tanzania (sounds like Tan-zan-EE-uh), I got to find out what it feels like to be a croc.

It all started when I was giving a talk to a group of children at their school. I was telling them about my work with crocodiles. One small boy raised his hand.

“Dr. Brady,” he asked, “why don't you dress up as a croc and join their club?”

At the time, I thought that was pretty

funny. I laughed and went on with my talk. But I couldn't shake the idea from my mind. *Could it actually work?* I wondered. There was one way to find out!

I asked the people at National Geographic if they could build me a life-like crocodile suit. Luckily, they were up for the job!

Artists made the head from a mold of a real crocodile head. That made it look exactly like the real

thing! It was made of a material called polystyrene (sounds like pahl-ee-STYE-reen). It is very lightweight, but strong.

Next, the engineers built the body. This part was important. It needed to protect

Did You Know?

Crocodiles have the strongest bite force on Earth. It's so strong, it's close to the bite force of a *Tyrannosaurus rex*.

my body if an angry croc decided to bite!

They made a set of metal ribs. These formed a strong cage around me. Then the cage was covered by a shield made of Kevlar. The same stuff is used to make bulletproof vests. That would make it hard for even a croc bite to break through!

Finally, the artists made a rubber cape that looked just like crocodile skin. This would cover the body and make it look like a real croc.

At last, my croc suit was ready. And boy, did it look real! My plan was to get close enough to a group of wild crocs to put high-tech devices on their backs. If my test was going to work, I would have to make the crocs believe I was one of them.



The croc suit was difficult to get around in. It was very heavy and very hot. I could only see straight ahead.

Chapter 2

Dangerous MISSION

A few months later, I was ready to join a bunch of big, wild crocs in Tanzania. I chose Tanzania because it has a lot of crocs. It also has extreme wet and dry seasons.

In the wet season, the crocs spread out over the wetlands. That makes them hard to find.

But in the dry season, the rivers begin to dry up. This creates many

separate pools. The crocs are forced to share these shrinking pools. This makes it much easier to find large groups of crocs.

When I got to Tanzania, a fellow scientist was there to help me. His name is Dr. Hannes Botha. He is a croc expert from South Africa.

Hannes and I have worked together many times over the years. We have captured huge crocs together. It is always comforting to work with a friend, someone you know and trust. This is especially true when capturing dangerous animals.

A group of people would help with our experiment. Hannes and I were the two scientists in the group. We also had a wildlife ranger. He would help keep us safe from lions, leopards, and other

animals that might want to eat us. And we had two brave National Geographic camera people.

This seemed like a small crew—at least to go after one of the largest predators on the planet: giant Nile crocodiles!

I squeezed my body into the tight suit. The thermometer inside read 120 degrees. *I might cook in this suit if I'm inside too long!* I thought.

My heart beat faster as I thought of the dangerous crocs a short distance away. There was also a herd of hippos I would have to crawl through to get to the crocs!

Everyone knows crocs are dangerous. What many people don't know is that the hippo is Africa's most dangerous animal.

Hippos aren't meat eaters, but they are

very territorial. You don't want to make them feel threatened if you are on their turf. And if a croc gets too close to a

hippo's baby, watch out!

The hippo can bite the croc in half. I would have to stay away from the hippo babies.

Once inside the suit, I felt really sick and really scared. The suit

weighed more than 80 pounds. It was very heavy, and I felt very cramped. But the worst part was the smell. We had smeared hippo poop all over it. It was important to cover up my human smell.

Soon it was time to go. My crew stepped back quietly. They hid themselves

Did You Know?

Tanzania is home to Africa's tallest mountain, Mount Kilimanjaro. It also has the deepest lake on the continent, Lake Tanganyika.

as well as they could. I started to crawl toward the crocs.

I could only see straight ahead because of my suit. I could not see to the sides or in back of me. But I could talk to my crew using my walkie-talkie. They would warn me if any angry crocs or hippos were moving toward me. It was great to have radio contact with my buddies. I needed to ask them for directions and help. It was good to hear their voices. Then I didn't feel so alone. It was very scary to be crawling around with danger on all sides.

To get to the crocs, I needed to crawl through the herd of hippos. Hippos can weigh three tons. That's 6,000 pounds. They can run like the wind. And they don't welcome intruders.



The Scoop on Hippo Poop

Hippos don't drop their poop like most animals. When a hippo has to go, its tail starts swishing back and forth very fast. Then the hippo lets loose with an explosive shower of poop. It flies through the air and covers everything. It's called a dung shower.

Hippos do this to mark their territory. One whiff of that dung and you'd want to stay away, too! The hippo dung on my croc suit was so strong, the crocs and hippos couldn't smell my human smell. It was a good—but smelly—disguise.

I knew the hippos were aware I was there. They were giving me the stare-down. Then I heard them wheeze-honking.

Wheeze-honking is a super-loud sound. It's something like a deep laugh. And it's followed by a *hurumph-hurumph-hurumph!* Believe me, it is frightening to hear nervous hippos wheeze-honking all around you.

Luckily, the hippos didn't bother me. I kept crawling through the herd. As I got near the crocs, my heart was pounding. My mouth was dry, and my body was shaking.

Yet, my senses were razor sharp—sharper than they had ever been before. I held my breath and inched closer. I had no idea what would happen next.



Humans only have two sets of teeth, but crocs lose teeth and grow new ones throughout their lifetime.

JOINING the Club

Then I saw it. Right in front of me! I came eye-to-eye with a croc. And its eyes were glued on me!

I had never seen a crocodile from a croc's-eye view before. Boy, did it look big!

The animal was beautiful—and scary! I was close enough to reach out and touch it. The croc kept staring at me.

Then, much to my relief, the big croc calmly closed its eyes. Clearly, it was not going to let me disturb its nap. This was a sign that the animal was okay with me being there.

I was within three feet of a wild croc. And it seemed to be accepting me as another croc. Amazing! The heat, the heavy suit, the sickening smell of the hippo poop—all those bad things seemed to just disappear. I was a crocodile among crocodiles! No one had ever done this before. I was totally caught up in the excitement of the moment.

Then, suddenly, my attention was jolted back to the dangers around me. One of my camera people radioed me. A large croc was moving toward me from behind.

A young man with glasses and a dark t-shirt is focused on working on a small, spherical robot in a workshop. He is using a tool to adjust a component on the robot. The workshop is filled with various tools, equipment, and other people in the background, suggesting a busy, creative environment. The scene is captured in a circular frame that overlaps with the text area.

Cool, Creative Lab

Let me take you behind the scenes to the National Geographic Lab!

The lab is a workshop where engineers and artists hang out. It's in the basement of the National Geographic building in Washington, D.C. It is an awesome and amazing place!

At any time, you might find them building mini-submarines. They also build remote-controlled helicopter cameras, and they construct seal decoys for sharks to attack. They can put together just about anything you could dream up!

I froze. My heart raced once again. I held my breath, waiting for an attack.

Would my croc suit protect me from the bite of a half-ton giant?

Did You Know?

Data-loggers are electronic devices, about the size of a quarter. They can be programmed to collect and store temperature readings over time.

Seconds seemed like hours, as I waited for the croc. I could hear its heavy feet slogging through the mud toward me. It moved closer. I could hear it breathing.

But then . . . nothing happened. The attack I feared never came. Instead, the croc rubbed up beside me and lay down. It was accepting me as one of the crocs! I could hardly believe it.

Still, anything could happen. Another croc could attack me at any minute. I

wanted to make history on this day—not become history!

It was time for action. I reached out to the croc in front of me. I glued a small data-logger to the croc's back. The data-logger was set up to sense temperature changes in the croc's area. It would record the temperature every five minutes.

Once I was sure the device was working, I pulled my arm in. Then I got out of there. I crawled away from the crocs as quickly as I could.

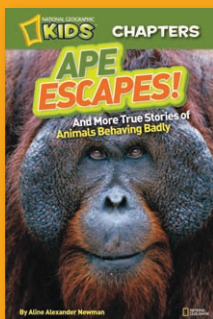
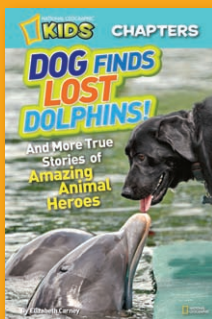
My undercover experiment had worked. On this day, I had become a crocodile. Just as the boy at the school had suggested, I had joined the crocodile club!

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC **KIDS**™ CHAPTERS

Incredible stories about animals and
the people who love them

In *Crocodile Encounters*, you'll get to know Brady Barr, a daring explorer who sometimes even dresses up in a crocodile suit! Whether he's crawling into a hole full of crocodiles or starting a "Croc School" for Ugandan wild-life rangers, Brady is always ready for an adventure. Now you can come along for the fun!

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—Mariam Jean Dreher,
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