

Milanosuchus niger



Black caiman

Conservation status



Scientific classification

Domain: Eukaryota
Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Class: Reptilia
Order: Crocodylia
Family: Alligatoridae
Subfamily: Caimaninae
Clade: Jacarea
Genus: Melanosuchus
Species: M. niger

Binomial Name

Melanosuchus niger
(Spix, 1825)

The black caiman or black jacaré (*Melanosuchus niger*) is an alligatorid sauropsid, being the only species of melanosuchus (*Melanosuchus*) alive.⁸² It has a characteristic black colour and lives in the Amazon. They can measure 6 meters, so they can devour animals such as deer or capybaras, and even tapirs and other large mammals. As its common and scientific name implies, the black caiman has a dark coloration as an adult. In some individuals, the dark coloration may appear almost black. It has grey to brown bands on the lower jaw. Juveniles have more vibrant colouration compared to adults with prominent white to pale yellow bands on the flanks that remain present well into adulthood, at least longer compared to other species.^{83,84}

Diet

The black caiman is the largest predator in the Amazon ecosystem and feeds on a variety of fish, reptiles, birds and mammals. It is a generalist and apex predator, potentially capable of taking any animal within its range, including other predators.^{85,86}

Threats and conservation

Once it was hunted to near extinction primarily for its high commercial value fur. Now it is returning, listed as Conservation Dependent. Generally a little-known species, it was not investigated in detail until the 1980s, when the leather trade had already taken its toll. It is a dangerous species to humans, and attacks have occurred in the past. A constant threat is its habitat destruction, as development and logging is now an epidemic in South America.^{87,88}