# How do you CT scan a 400-pound crocodile? One surprising finding may change his care

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Bill the crocodile in the CT scanner. Credit: Utah's Hogle Zoo

At 61 years old, Bill had started showing changes to his health—decreased appetite, weight loss, and abdominal bloating. But his blood work was normal, leaving the cause of his symptoms unknown.

The next step was clear: Bill should get a CT scan to check for any problems with his internal organs.

There was just one hurdle: Bill is a nearly 400-pound Siamese crocodile.

In a highly coordinated effort, Bill's care team at Utah's Hogle Zoo worked with CT experts at University of Utah Health to transport and then scan Bill—a process involving specialized support for Bill's body and advanced imaging techniques. The scan revealed several stones in Bill's stomach, which, while normal for crocodiles, may be contributing to his symptoms.

## Animal care in action

Animal care and veterinary teams at Hogle Zoo began closely monitoring Bill after observing changes to his health in 2025, including a decreased appetite, weight loss, and abdominal bloating. Despite these symptoms, his blood work remained normal, leaving the underlying cause unclear.

The team decided to pursue advanced diagnostics, including a CT scan, which would require the team to execute a transport like none other. This extensive feat called for significant expertise and coordination across the zoo. It also carried inherent risks, particularly for an aging animal like Bill.

Bill has a bite force of over 3,000 PSI. To transport him, the more than 20-person team used specialized tools and techniques to safely restrain him, ensuring control of his head and body. From there, he was given a mild sedative under veterinary supervision to help him stay calm throughout the process.

"I am proud of how safely and smoothly everyone worked together, and how positive the team remained throughout the process," says Meredith

Salinas, Animal Care Supervisor in Herpetology at Hogle Zoo. "Teamwork really makes the dream work for crocodilian catchups."

Bill the 400-pound Siamese crocodile. Credit: Utah's Hogle Zoo

## Collaboration of care

Bill was placed on a secure, custom-made platform and carefully moved to U of U Health for imaging at the Department of Radiology. Throughout transport and the duration of the scan, veterinary staff monitored him closely to ensure his safety and well-being.

Hassan Bourija, radiology supervisor at U of U Health, and Scott Ehrgott, CT technologist at U of U Health, CT scanned the crocodile's whole body to assess him, under the leadership of Edward Quigley, MD, Ph.D., professor of radiology at U of U Health.

The radiology team took on the unique challenge of scanning a 10-foot-long reptilian patient in stride. "Our table is eight and a half feet long, even with the extension, and his tail was still sticking out a little bit," Bourija explains. "We actually had to flip him around because the CT scanner table can only travel a certain distance. So we had to do the head, neck, and most of his chest and abdomen first, and then flip him around to do the rest of his body."

The radiologists also customized the CT parameters to safely get a good picture of Bill's body. "We programmed the radiation dose manually," Ehrgott says. "For humans, the radiation dose is modulated automatically, but we don't necessarily have that capability for someone who is much larger and has much thicker armored skin than a human being."

"Crocodiles are unique, long-lived animals that don't visit the doctor very often," adds Erika Crook, DVM, Dipl. ACZM, Board Certified Specialist in Zoological Medicine and Director of Animal Health for Hogle Zoo. "With their heavy armor (scales), they make routine veterinary diagnostics difficult. We needed a CT unit that could handle his girth and weight, and fortunately, University of Utah Health was willing to take on this challenge with the zoo."

## Bill of health

CT scan results revealed several stones in Bill's stomach, which may be contributing to the symptoms observed by his care team. Crocodiles swallow stones to help with digestion, both in their natural habitat and in

human care. Bill's blood work remained normal, and there was no evidence of cancer.

Following the scan, Bill was safely transported back to the zoo, where he could recover in a private, behind-the-scenes area. He gradually returned to his habitat, where he returned to his pool and rejoined habitat-mate Hillary. Now, Bill is showing less bloating, improved appetite, and increased energy.

Animal care and veterinary teams continue to monitor Bill. Given his age and current condition, the Hogle Zoo team is weighing the pros and cons of a stone-removal procedure, with decisions guided by Bill's overall well-being and quality of life.

Bill and Hillary have been a familiar part of visits to Hogle Zoo for decades, connecting generations of guests to their species. Behind the scenes, that time reflects ongoing, dedicated care from the teams who look after them each day.

"These animals are worth it," Bourija says. "If you can help them out and find out what's wrong with them before they get sicker, why not?"

Ehrgott adds, "Honestly, Bill was a perfect patient."

Provided by University of Utah Health Sciences

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