

Crocodile Specialist Group Steering Committee Meeting

(Montreal, Canada; 15 October 1996)

Present: H. Messel, R. Elsey, D. Ashley, J. Hutton, G. Webb, R. Jenkins, O. Behra, S. Broad, F.W. King, A. Larriera, P. Ross. Observers: D. Siswomartono (Indonesia), G. Cortez (Colombia), A. Imhof (Argentina), A. Rosser (SSC Trade Program), E. Fernandez (Honduras).

The meeting opened at 9.10 am and the Executive Officer presented a financial report for January - September 1996. Revenues were \$61,885.66 in unrestricted donations, \$4,144 for special projects, \$2,592.31 for newsletter subscriptions and \$347.50 for sales of publications. Expenses for general operations totaled \$55,269.25 and special projects \$11,072.22. The current balance was \$38,215.94. It was hoped that additional donations received before the end of the year would allow us to start the next year with funds in hand for general operations expense for 1997. The amount of \$1,514.78 appearing in the report as bank charges was explained as the new administrative fee charged by the University of Florida to handle our account as announced in May (Steering Committee minutes).

Changes in the Steering Committee enacted on the recommendation of the May Steering Committee meeting were reported. Alejandro Larriera is Vice Chairman for Latin America and Dr. Choo Hoo Giam has joined Grahame Webb's Asian section. Lehr Brisbin will serve with Val Lance in the Science section and Bernardo Ortiz will be an ex-officio member representing IUCN. Steven Edwards has agreed that the SSC Sustainable Use Initiative has adequate representation through other CSG members and agreed to step down. Steven Broad has agreed to serve as Vice Chairman for Trade Monitoring and Lorrie Collins of WCMC will be join the Trade Monitoring section, allowing Richard Luxmore and Ginette Hemley to step down. Sergio Trachter has been inactive and may no longer be associated with the caiman trade. The Executive Officer will ask Vice Chairman for Trade, Kevin van Jaarsveldt for his recommendation.

The CSG membership will be reconstituted for the new triennium 1997-2000, following SSC practice. Vice Chairmen were invited to begin the process of nominating or re-nominating members and a simplified process for renewal outlined. The Executive Officer will provide lists of current members to the Vice Chairs who will recommend to the Chairman who should be renewed and any additional members nominated. The Executive Officer will then send out letters of invitation from the Chairman to nominated members who should confirm their acceptance directly to the Executive Officer. The Executive Office will then inform SSC and IUCN who has accepted membership. A CSG directory of members will be prepared and distributed. This process will be undertaken by early 1997. Discussion followed on whether CSG member addresses should be published on the CSG Homepage and it was concluded that they should not. Brief discussion followed on whether CSG membership should remain constant, further expanded or reduced. It was agreed that regional Vice Chairs may follow their own inclinations regarding who and how many members were appropriate for their region. The Chairman noted that there were fundraising advantages to having a broad membership and that an inclusive approach should be encouraged.

The Executive officer summarized discussions held at the SSC meeting describing the development of national and regional networks of SSC-Specialist Group members to coordinate conservation action at these levels. These national and regional networks will allow members of diverse specialist groups to interact and provide locally specific input to broad conservation and biodiversity issues. Development of the networks is well advanced in several South American countries and in West Africa and is progressing more slowly elsewhere. These networks follow the general tendency to decentralization currently underway in IUCN. To ensure that CSG remains in contact with national and regional issues we need to ensure that CSG members at these levels are put in contact with the developing networks. Grahame Webb mentioned the growing common

interest of CSG and the Marine Turtle Specialist Group and recommended that a joint meeting to discuss issues be convened. The Executive Officer undertook to contact his opposite number in MTSG for this purpose.

The venue for the next (14th) Working meeting of the CSG was discussed. The Singapore Reptile Traders Association has renewed its offer to host the meeting in 1998 as long as the dates do not conflict with some regional trade events. Discussion was held concerning placing the meeting in India to address current conservation concerns there, or in Cuba. Concerns were expressed that accommodations in Singapore might exceed the financial resources of many members. The very successful travel and housing subsidy program provided by the organizers of the Argentina meeting was presented as a solution to this problem. After consideration of the different factors it was agreed that the Executive Officer should pursue the invitation with Singapore to clarify these issues and develop a concrete proposal for 1998.

Mexican Regional Meeting. Letters from the Mexican sponsors of the Regional CSG Meeting in 1997 were presented and the Chairman formally accepted their commitment to host the meeting and directed that detailed arrangements proceed. The meeting is proposed for 4-7 August 1997 in Villahermosa, Mexico. Invitations will be sent to all Central American and Caribbean CSG contacts and general announcement will go out with the next (Vol 15 (4) December) newsletter.

World Wildlife Fund airport promotions opposing wildlife use. A response from WWF to our letter was presented. The letter suggests that the deceptive poster campaign currently on display in airports around the world is focused on a campaign to enforce UK regulations on imports of wildlife products. The problems we outlined in our letter were not addressed. However, informants close to WWF UK suggested that our letter had caused the WWF board to raise question to their staff about the publicity program and there had been some internal recognition that the substance of the campaign had been oversimplified and distorted in the promotional material. After discussion, we agreed to maintain the dialog that has been initiated by proposing to assist WWF re-focus its campaign toward how the public can differentiate legal permitted products from illegal unpermitted ones. It was also recommended that the correspondence be copied to the UK CITES management authority. The Executive Officer drafted the following reply:

29 October, 1996

Mr. Robin Pellew, Director WWF-UK

Panda House, Weyside Park, Catteshall Lane

Godalming Surrey GU7 1XR, UK

Dear Mr. Pellew:

Thank you for your response to our letter of May 29. I have delayed answering until after our Steering Committee Meeting held 15 October 1996 in Montreal when I had an opportunity to discuss your letter with the CSG Chairman and Steering Committee. I can now reply with their reaction. The Steering Committee was very pleased that you have opened a dialogue with us and we feel that the matter is of sufficient importance that we should continue to discuss it.

We were not entirely satisfied with the reply you gave as it appeared to miss our main point that the effect of the poster (independent of your intention) is to discourage sustainable use which is good for crocodilian conservation. However, your reply, with the attached brochure (which unfortunately was not in evidence near your poster at the time our members saw it in Heathrow) certainly clarifies

the intent of your campaign. It does still appear to us that the promotional poster (no doubt designed by some PR whiz) has distorted the campaign that WWF, TRAFFIC International and HM Customs and Excise intended, and that the subtleties of CITES controls and permits have become distorted to a simple and deceptive anti-use message.

We certainly agree that crocodilian imports must be accompanied by the necessary permits (which are not in fact required by CITES for personal possessions, but are required, quite legally, by the stricter measures enacted in the UK and several other countries). Educating the buying public that there are such things as legal crocodilian products (in fact the great bulk of products available in most places) and that the programs that produce them are a very positive benefit to the conservation of crocodilians, their habitats and the many other creatures that share them, is a most worthwhile goal. How about replacing your poster with another showing four identical crocodilian handbags, three displayed with their required documentation (for example an Australian personal exemptions CITES tag, a US alligator export permit and a German Reptilartenschutz product label) and prominently labelled 'LEGAL', and one lacking documentation labelled 'BANNED'. Instead of 'By Bye' with its obvious 'Don't buy' message, the poster could be headed 'Buy legal'. Not so snappy as 'By bye' perhaps, but with the undeniable advantage of being both truthful and a positive contribution to crocodile conservation. I think it is very important that we (or I should really say you) do not allow the public relations appeal of simplicity to override the really important, and complex, conservation tasks we are all engaged in.

We look on the WWF family, and on WWF-UK, as natural allies in the conservation struggle. That is why we continue to think it important that we share our thoughts on this issue, gently chide you when we feel you are in error, and continue to offer our assistance so that you can get it right. Let's keep the communications open on this. Best wishes.

Yours sincerely,

James Perran Ross, Executive Officer CSG

Review of Zimbabwe crocodile program. CSG members G. Webb, A. Velasco and D. David evaluated the review of the Zimbabwe program drafted by Professor J. Loveridge and their comments have been submitted back to the Zimbabwe Department of Parks and Wildlife. The commentators agreed on the great depth and value of Prof. Loveridge's review which draws attention to several aspects of the program that require attention and improved operations. The evaluations endorsed the recommendations of the review and CSG has recommended that Parks and Wildlife, in conjunction with the Crocodile Farmers Association, move to address these recommendations and implement some renewed management actions to re-establish the credibility of the program. Jon Hutton reported that action on this matter is made complex by recent changes in the Zimbabwe government and some institutional dislocations that have resulted. The IUCN Regional Office for Southern Africa has undertaken a key role in facilitating progress on a number of wildlife management issues and the CSG recommendations have been passed to them as well. A workshop has been scheduled for 28 -29 November for IUCN-ROSA, CFAZ, the government and other interested groups to address wildlife management issues. It is hoped to insert discussion of the crocodile management program in this discussion and CSG has offered to send a technical expert to assist this discussion. Following the Steering Committee meeting these recommendations were presented directly to representatives from IUCN-ROSA and Dept. of Parks and Wildlife. Continued communication to the players will be needed to implement action on this problem.

Captive breeding statement. The draft policy on captive breeding developed in Argentina was reviewed and approved.

Aware that CITES Conference Resolution 8.3 establishes that trade in some species of wildlife can generate conservation benefits;
Recalling that many species of crocodylians were placed on Appendix I of CITES, which limited any commercial activity to closed-cycle captive breeding;
Recognizing that commercial captive breeding can and has generated conservation benefits for some species of crocodylians in some countries;
Acknowledging that the Crocodile Specialist Group has encouraged captive breeding for conservation programs;
Accepting that wild harvest programs carried out on a sustainable basis link the benefits derived from commercial use directly with the wild populations and their habitats, which is not the case with commercial captive breeding;
Recalling IUCN Resolution 18.24 which acknowledges the conservation benefits from sustainable wild harvest programs;
Concerned that the conservation benefits derived from sustainable wild harvest programs can be undermined by excessive production from closed cycle captive breeding programs, with little and sometimes non conservation benefits, as described in CITES Conf. Res. 8.22;
The Crocodile Specialist Group:
Will continue to encourage conservation programs based on sustainable use of wild crocodile programs,
Will not encourage the pursuit of commercially oriented closed-cycle captive breeding programs where they are likely to undermine conservation efforts relying on the sustainable use of wild populations,
Where conservation benefits may result, will assist countries with programs based on closed-cycle captive breeding to extend their management activities to include sustained use of wild populations.

Ranching proposals for COP 10. Proposals for ranching crocodiles were submitted to CITES by Argentina (*Caiman latirostris*), Uganda and Madagascar (*C. niloticus*). Following a request from the SSC Trade Program for rapid technical review of these proposals, they were circulated by SSC Trade program to a selection of CSG members (6 each proposal) suggested by the Executive Officer. Concerns were expressed by the Steering Committee that the independent comments of members might not reflect the consensus view of the Steering Committee or CSG and might be misrepresented to be official CSG opinion. Several Steering Committee members expressed annoyance that they had not been directly consulted on proposals from their area. The Executive Officer explained his intention to first solicit technical comments from members, and then to request coordinated comment from the Steering Committee from which a coherent and non-contradictory recommendation could be developed. Unexpected difficulties arose from the timing of the proposal review process that requires official comments to be returned to proponents so that they can submit revised proposals by January 1997. To resolve this difficulty the Steering Committee delegated a small subcommittee of G. Webb, J. Hutton, O. Behra and R. Jenkins to quickly review the proposals and submit comments and make general recommendations for the Chairman to transmit to IUCN and CITES Secretariat, with the further understanding that there would be additional consultation directly to the proponents in the course of final proposal negotiations. The Executive Officer was asked to advise all Steering Committee members that they could request copies of the proposals for review.

Argentina proposal. Alejandro Larriera requested the support of the Steering Committee for a process to bring the various States of Argentina together to coordinate crocodylian management policy. A letter was drafted following the meeting.

Universal tagging. Questions raised by the United States concerning what kind of tags should be applied to clear containers of crocodilian skin parts and scraps were presented to the CITES Animals Committee at their meeting in Prague in September and clarifying notification to the parties was drafted. The clarification confirms that tags on skins must meet all the requirements of Res. Conf 9.22 but that the tag placed on a bag of parts may be either a tag similar to a skin tag or some other tag (e.g. adhesive paper) as long as it is non-reusable and the specified information for exports or re-exports is present.

Export Quotas Res. Conf. 6.17. Dietrich Jelden called the attention of the group to Resolution 6.17 which has been effectively replaced by Res. 9.22 (Universal Tagging) but which remains in effect and is technically in contradiction to 9.22. It was apparently an oversight in the development of 9.22 that 6.17 was not repealed. After brief discussion it was agreed that this matter could be easily solved by the CITES Secretariat as part of its process of consolidation of resolutions currently underway and that a letter advising they consider this in their process be sent.

Captive Breeding Resolution. A process to reform the CITES regulations for Captive Breeding has been underway since September 1995, coordinated by Charles Dauphine of Canada and has generated wide discussion of the issues. Hank Jenkins reported that matter received discussion at the Prague Animals Committee meeting and that a draft resolution is in preparation for discussion at COP 10.

Transfer of commercial samples. A very sensible proposal has been made to allow the movement of trade samples from one country to another and back again without invoking all the lengthy complexities of import and export permits at both ends. A proposal has now been drafted by the Animals Committee to allow CITES parties to issue a single 'export-re-import permit' that will allow samples to leave and return easily. The proposal will be considered at the 10th COP.

New CSG Brochure. The new brochure was presented. Assistance with graphic design and production was gratefully received from Environmental Science and Engineering Inc., Smittle & Associates and Lyn Lawhead and the Alligator Cycle of Protection, Inc. We are also grateful to Harry and Peter Freeman, Carlos Yamashita, Andres Vallejo, Rom Whitaker, Jack Cox and Harry Andrews who allowed us to use their photos. Cost of production was \$460 or \$0.09 per copy. Samples were distributed with Newsletter Vol. 15 (3) and a supply provided to Vice chairmen. Additional copies can be obtained by request to the Executive officer.

Indonesia. After reviewing the long history of CSG efforts and investment in improving crocodile management in Indonesia (see minutes Steering Committee 1990 - 1996) the chairman asked what the current situation was. Hank Jenkins reported that he visited Indonesia last May and was reassured that there was no intention of unilaterally opening the current trade embargo. He explained that some hardship was experienced in Irian Jaya where the crocodile trade was one of the few cash sources for many people, and that political pressure from Irian Jaya to re-open trade had prompted earlier discussions of lifting the embargo, which had now been withdrawn. PHPA was trying to develop a management plan that would be acceptable to CSG and the international community and also be realistic and practical in Indonesia. Current activities are focused upon management of wild populations in Irian Jaya and the regulation of farms. Some positive advances have been made. LIPI, the scientific agency in Indonesia, has conducted crocodile surveys in Irian Jaya in 1995 and 1996. Dissemination of the results of these surveys is strongly recommended. The CSG project on *Tomistoma* in Sumatra has received great practical assistance from

PHPA and good preliminary results on distribution and biology of this very rare species is now being obtained. A draft management plan has been prepared and sent to CSG members G Webb and H. Jenkins to informally review.

Mr. Dwiatmo Siswomartono of PHPA confirmed that Indonesia would not re-open trade without CSG review of its management plan and that this plan was being developed. He stated that Indonesia was ready to send the plan to the Secretariat and to invite CSG to a review of the plan and its implementation. He also reported that PHPA is developing a system to monitor movement of crocodile skins within Indonesia and that there have been several successful interdictions of illegal trade from Irian Jaya to Thailand and Papua New Guinea.

Steve Broad noted that staff changes had slowed development of crocodile management, but that he thought we could now move forward to assist the management plan implementation. He noted that there continued to be a substantial flow of manufactured crocodilian products leaving Indonesia as personal possessions and that the current situation was not satisfactory from a conservation perspective.

It was noted that although there may have been expectations of a prompt movement toward developing a management plan and reopening trade after a CSG review, that in fact no schedule was established, and experience with the very slow progress of regulatory changes in other countries (the 12 years for US to change its *C. porosus* regulations as an example) suggested speed of progress in Indonesia might also be slow and our expectations need to be realistic.

Dwiatmo closed the discussion by proposing to informally circulate the draft management plan to CSG and requesting continued communication on the issue. He requested a preliminary target date for a CSG review and proposed that review in Indonesia might be possible as soon as late February. Professor Messel agreed that CSG would be very pleased to receive an invitation from the Indonesian government to conduct a review in that time frame.

Tanzania. Dietrich Jelden had proposed to meet with Tanzanian representative Emmanuel Severre in Europe in September, but it was thought that the meeting had not occurred. No additional information on the level of harvesting of wild, crocodiles or the status of Tanzania's request for a 1997 harvest were available. Noting that the agreement negotiated in Fort Lauderdale in 1994 left the responsibility clearly with Tanzania to report to the CITES Secretariat on the quota harvest as a condition of obtaining quotas beyond 1996, it was agreed to await further information.

Honduras. Eric Fernandez presented a detailed list of actions taken in Honduras to implement the recommendations derived from discussions in September 1995 with the CITES Secretariat, Animals Committee and CSG. A new law (Presidential degree # 2578-95) was passed incorporating most of the recommendations applying generally to captive breeding operations. A second set of detailed recommendations on procedures to regulate crocodile farms and issue export tags and permits had been referred to CODEFOR, the CITES regulatory agency, for incorporation into their procedures and regulations. The finalization and implementation of these regulations appears to be the only remaining impediment to approval of the registration of the San Pedro Sula farm for *C. acutus* and is entirely in the hands of the Honduras authorities (as it has been for the past year). Eric reported that the farm currently holds about 10,400 animals and is producing 2,000 - 3,000 hatchlings/year. One of the other farms in Honduras (GGI) has closed and the stock are said

to be in poor condition pending their dispersal to alternate facilities which is delayed by legal procedures. The other Honduras farm (Midence) is restricted to tourist viewing. CODEFOR has been inspecting the farms regularly and has temporarily stopped issuing import permits for caiman skins of Nicaraguan origin until the current flow of skins between Nicaragua, Europe, USA and Honduras can be understood.

Noting that development of adequate regulations for crocodile farms has been integrated into comprehensive wildlife management and conservation regulation, the meeting expressed its admiration of these advances and hope that they would soon be complete. Ecuador. Following discussions between Dr. A. Paucar of INEFAN, Ecuador, and alligator experts Tommy Hines and Phil Wilkinson, plans are underway to conduct a technical training workshop for crocodilian management in Ecuador. This will be part of the slowly developing management and regulatory structure in Ecuador to support ranching of *Melanosuchus niger*, which is underway on an experimental basis.

Philippine crocodile. Perran Ross summarized a sequence of recent contacts between CSG, the Melbourne Zoo (Australia), Fort Worth Zoo and Gladys Porter Zoo (USA) and the Department of Environmental Resources, Silliman University and Crocodile Farming Institute (Philippines) concerning an integrated approach to management, captive breeding and in-situ conservation of the Philippine crocodile. All the participants appeared to be coming together and the time is considered to be very appropriate to convene a meeting of all interested players to develop a coherent strategy for the conservation of the species. Discussions have been opened with representatives from the Philippines government on their needs and desires for technical and practical assistance. It was noted that the recent suspension of hostilities between the central government and Muslim separatists in Mindanao opened the opportunity for the first time in many years for surveys and practical conservation action in the Ligusan Marsh, thought to be a remaining stronghold of the Philippine crocodile. The area may be suitable for community based ranching to encourage crocodile and crocodile habitat conservation rather than development as rice fields. The Executive Officer was encouraged to continue facilitating dialog between interested parties with the aim of developing a forum where a conservation and management plan integrating all these ideas and interests can be constructed.

Crocodile data bank. A proposal prepared by WCMC and Lorrie Collins, to collect a wide variety of crocodile data (e.g. trade information, distributions, specimens, habitat) was presented for information. It was not clear whether this proposal is part of ongoing efforts to form an SSC wide data base for Specialist Group Information, and to amalgamate SSC/IUCN databases in Biological Conservation Information System (BCIS) with information from other conservation partners. No current action by CSG is required and Steve Broad undertook to keep the Steering Committee advised on how this issue develops.

Points to evaluate management programs. Following discussion at Santa Fe in May on the draft 'criteria' for evaluating crocodile management programs, John Thorbjarnarson undertook to revise the draft. An amended version was submitted for consideration. The Committee emphasized again that the word 'Criteria' implied too restrictive a conception of what were conceived to be very broad and flexible guidelines that might be considered or adapted. On this point the document was referred to additional consideration and testing in field situations.

European crocodile conservation center. Olivier Behra outlined his current activities organizing a crocodile display near Paris that was conceived to be the nucleus of an international center for education and conservation research on crocodilians. With support

from a philanthropist, it was hoped to make the planned facility a vehicle for conservation in francophone Europe and Africa. The chairman asked Olivier to keep the CSG advised on his progress.

SE Asian concerns, Vietnam farm registrations. Information was presented that Vietnam has currently 2 or 3 proposals under consideration for the registration of crocodile captive breeding facilities by CITES for international trade. The very rapid expansion of crocodile farming in Vietnam has been well documented in the Newsletter. Concerns were expressed that Vietnam was proceeding rapidly on the path that Thailand had taken, with total commitment to captive breeding and little or no consideration of conservation of wild populations. A result similar to that in Thailand, with virtual extirpation of wild crocodiles, is considered unacceptable but no concrete proposal for action to prevent this was made. CSG contacts and influence in Vietnam remain limited.

Concern about *Alligator sinensis*. Grahame Webb expressed concern that the Chinese alligator remained the most critically endangered crocodylian species in the wild, and that little was known about recent events regarding conservation or captive breeding efforts. Some updated information on captive breeding efforts was available as correspondence to the Newsletter 15 (3). Noting the activities of the Wildlife Conservation Society in Chinese conservation, the Committee agreed to ask John Thorbjarnarson to track this matter. Steve Broad noted that there was funding currently available for field conservation in China and a broadly recognized need to re-focus Chinese conservation toward wild habitats. The Executive Officer was asked to correspond with Dr. Wang Sung of the Academia Sinica to make this point.

Next meeting. The Steering Committee recommended scheduling a meeting in Harare, Zimbabwe, shortly before and during the 10th Conference of the Parties to CITES, but noted that review and continued input to CITES proposals would have to be conducted by the committee prior to that meeting by fax. Hank Jenkins advised the meeting that negotiations were underway between the Zimbabwe government and CITES regarding hotel costs, which had been artificially elevated for the duration of the CITES meeting, but that a reasonable outcome was expected. There being no further business the meeting closed at 5.45 p.m. P. Ross, *rapporteur*.