

STEERING COMMITTEE

CROCODILE SPECIALIST GROUP STEERING
COMMITTEE, MINUTES , 30 MAY 1991, TOKYO,
JAPAN

Present: H. Messel (Chairman), J. Hutton, N. Ishii, T. Joanen, P. Ross, K. van Jaarsveld, G. Webb, T. Yamanaka. CITES Observer: J. Berney. Observers: B Angsirijinda, D. Ashley, P. Ashley, Z. Casey, J. Cox, Y. Kaneko, W. Sagera, Y. Takahara, C. Youngprapakorn.

Professor Messel opened the meeting at 8:05 pm. Steering Committee members were in Tokyo for a symposium on sustainable use of wildlife sponsored by JLIA and had taken the opportunity to hold a Steering Committee meeting.

Finances. Accounts and budgets are now developed quarterly and annually. A summary for the second quarter of 1991 was presented. Balance at the end of the first quarter was \$10,813.22, revenue during the second quarter to date was \$10,200.15 and expenses were \$6,643.11 leaving a balance at 25 May of \$14,370.26. Total donations for the year are \$26,090 and significant income is being realized from miscellaneous sales (\$3,740). Detailed receipts and accounts of

all revenues and expenses are available for scrutiny. Estimated annual core costs for running the CSG remain at about \$55,000 per year. Significant new expenses are being experienced for Mail and Phone which are no longer provided by other institutions. The need for significant additional donations to cover running costs of the CSG for the remainder of the year was discussed. A recent appeal to patrons had resulted in increased donations as well as valuable ideas on the expansion and stabilization of support for the Group. Professor Messel expressed his great appreciation to patrons for their continued assistance.

Several participants pointed out that clear accounting was a great incentive to potential donors who could see how their donations were being well used. Professor Messel indicated that in future the CSG accounts could be published in the NEWSLETTER.

Jon Hutton announced that the Crocodile Farmers Association of Zimbabwe (CFAZ) was contributing to the running expenses of the African regional office and an amount equivalent to about US \$10,000 in local currency had been pledged. He also announced that The Peoples Trust for Endangered Species had donated a grant of US \$30,000 to support a study of the survival of crocodiles released from farms into the wild. An announcement to recruit a suitable researcher in Africa has been circulated.

Jon also described a recent initiative of CFAZ with its Japanese buyer to successfully develop a product tag that will accompany manufactured products produced from Zimbabwe Nile Crocodiles. The cardboard tag has an attractive logo and explains that the product is made from crocodile skin produced in a sustained management and conservation program and that a portion of the purchase price will be donated to the Japanese Nagao Conservation Foundation. The Nagao Foundation will then distribute funds to support crocodilian conservation. Professor Messel and the Group praised this initiative as a model of how sustainable use and commercial enterprise can be linked to consumer education and fundraising for conservation.

Jon Hutton asked whether the distribution of SSC Action Plans was cost effective and whether, if Action Plans were distributed to a more restricted audience, the funds saved could be used to help Specialist Groups. Prof. Messel replied that the action plans were funded from a

special endowment that was not available for other purposes and that the SSC Steering Committee felt that the Action Plans were the most concrete and visible evidence of SSC action and deserved the widest possible circulation.

Additional Deputy Vice Chairmen. In response to letters from Ted Joanen and Kevin van Jaarsveldt to the Chairman, discussion was held on adding another Deputy Vice Chairman for Trade from the American region. Discussion of the regional representation most needed and of some potential candidates was held. Professor Messel closed the discussion after stating that he expected to be advised by the relevant Vice Chairmen on the need and nominations for such a position.

CITES - 1992 proposals review. Proposals for changes in the CITES appendices based on ranching operations were received by the Secretariat from Madagascar, Kenya, Tanzania and Indonesia by the deadline of 7 April 1991. Draft proposals of resolutions on criteria for transferring crocodiles between appendices based on ranching, and on universal marking systems were also in preparation. The need for timely review and careful scrutiny by the broadest cross section of appropriate CSG members was recognized and a schedule and procedure to ensure this was outlined. These proposals must receive preliminary review and be returned to the applicants for revision and final submission by 4 October. Additional proposals for appendix changes must be received by 4 October and all proposals will be available for final review by CSG shortly thereafter. Amie Brautigam of the Trade Specialist Group was providing text of the proposals and the Chairman of CSG was coordinating with the executive officer to distribute them for review. In addition to the review of proposals, the CSG can route comments directly through the Secretariat and its committees, through our Vice Chairman for Trade Monitoring, Ginette Hemley, and of course, directly during the CITES meeting process. It was agreed that the CSG position on the various proposals be discussed and consolidated at the next Steering Committee meeting (proposed for Colombia in November 1991) after the proposals have been reviewed.

CITES Crocodile Review Groups. Final composition of the review groups established

during the Steering Committee meeting last April in Gainesville was announced as follows : Africa - H. Messel, W. King, W. E. Waitkuwait (coordinator for French speaking Africa), O. Behra, K. van Jaarsveldt (coordinator English speaking Africa), J. Hutton, J. Kundaeli (CITES secretariat); Asia and Oceania - H. Messel (coordinator), W. King, G. Webb, Y. Takehara, J. Cox, B. Vernon, J. Berney (CITES secretariat); South and Central America and the Caribbean - H. Messel, W. King (co-coordinator), N. Scott, O. Menghi (CITES Secretariat & co-coordinator) J. Villalba-Macias, G. Hemley, D. Jelden, A. Eloy Siejas, J. Hutton. These review groups will assist CITES to review proposals and activities in the regions and each group will also contain a scientific counterpart from the country under review for a given issue.

11th working meeting preparations, Zimbabwe. Venue and dates for the meeting are as reported in the last NEWSLETTER, 2 to 7 August 1992 at Victoria Falls. The organizing committee of Kevin van Jaarsveldt, Jon Hutton and Mr. Strath Brown (President of CFAZ) is active and has engaged 2 staff to assist in preparations. A preliminary call for registrations has been circulated in the NEWSLETTER. There is a need to provide a broad range of costs for accommodations including some cheap possibilities. The schedule of speakers is being prepared by Val Lance and Mark Ferguson and it was explained that the schedule will focus around keynote addresses on major issues and that the more routine reports would be encouraged to be made as poster presentations. It was requested that a few speaking slots be kept available for younger presenters (graduate students, etc.). Kevin van Jaarsveldt commented that some confusion had resulted from the apparent vacillation by CSG between alternate venues after the Zimbabwe venue had been approved at the last Steering Committee meeting. The Chairman agreed that decisions made by him at the Steering Committee meetings should be stuck to without subsequent vacillation.

Regional meeting of the CSG, Santa Marta, Colombia, 11 - 14 November 1991. Plans for this meeting were proceeding satisfactorily now that both the management authority (INDERENA) and the Colombian Association of Wildlife Farmers were sponsoring the meeting.

Preliminary calls for registration had been circulated. Prof. Messel requested that the next Steering Committee meeting be held immediately prior to this meeting as a large proportion of the Steering Committee apparently intended to be there. He suggested the two days 9-10 November be set aside for the Steering Committee and that substantial discussion of the Caiman issue be held at that time.

Sustainable Use debate. Considerable response and exchange of letters had been stimulated by Prof. Messel's letter submitted to WILDLIFE CONSERVATION Magazine. The draft letter has been widely circulated and lengthy rebuttals and counter rebuttals prepared. Recently WILDLIFE CONSERVATION informed the CSG they would not publish the letter and so it has been submitted in modified form to SSC SPECIES Newsletter. In response to a comment concerning the Canadian customs brochure in CSG NEWSLETTER, vol 9(4), correspondence was exchanged between Prof. Messel and Mr. R. Campbell, Administrator of CITES in Canada. This clarified the stance of Canada in favour of sustainable use [see letters below].

Crocodile Action Plan. The draft action plan text has been finalized and submitted to SSC for publication. It requires maps and photographs and will be reviewed by the IUCN publications advisory group and then produced by SSC.

Introduction to Farming of Crocodiles. This valuable manual compiled by Jon Hutton and Richard Luxmoore is now complete and it is proposed to append it to the Directory of Crocodile Farms being published by Wildlife Conservation Monitoring Center (WCMC). Prof. Messel noted that this manual is a very valuable source book for farmers and is strongly complimentary to the recent FAO publication, 'Management of Crocodiles in captivity' by Melvin Bolton. It was hoped that the CSG Manual could be published quickly. The Bolton / FAO manual is already difficult to find due to low supply and the executive officer was instructed to write to Mr. Gil Childs of FAO requesting that Bolton's manual be reprinted to ensure its wide availability.

Crocodile management policy in Vanuatu. Prof. Messel informed the group of a recent survey of crocodiles in Vanuatu that contained the rather

surprising recommendation that the few remaining animals of this easternmost range extension of *C. porosus* be allowed to become extinct. The population had already been reduced to very low numbers by a combination of natural phenomena and hunting, and local people were opposed to the crocodile's presence. A claim that this is a recently introduced population cannot be substantiated. Prof. Messel announced that this recommendation was contrary to the policy of CSG to prevent extinction of crocodile populations and was unacceptable. Discussion followed on how high a priority to give this issue and what level of response was appropriate. It was agreed that Prof. Messel would take up this issue with authorities in Vanuatu.

Nile Crocodile Report. This report, originally prepared by Jon Hutton, for the CITES secretariat and meeting of the parties in 1990, contains a useful summary of information on the situation of Nile crocodile conservation in Africa and has now been prepared in a format suitable for publication. Jon asked whether it should be published as a CSG publication and whether CITES might pay for the production. No response was recorded.

Indonesia. The up to date situation in Indonesia with regard to the FAO crocodile project there was presented by Jack Cox. Jack reported on the success of surveys in Kalimantan and Sumatra last year and gave a review of the current state of crocodile farming [see regional reports]. Funding for the project has been uncertain since the beginning of the year and the project was only able to continue with interim funding from WWF and this would run out 31 May. Operations of the project would therefore be suspended until an alternative donor could be located. This would seriously imperil the conservation gains of the project to date that had been enhanced by recent visits to Indonesia by Grahame Webb and Hank Jenkins. A proposal to down list Indonesian populations to Appendix II has been prepared with consultation from Webb and Jenkins.

Discussion followed on the ramifications of this situation in regard to CITES and future trade. Trade irregularities continue, despite a reduction, and there are recent reports of tampering with CITES tags. The sustainability of the current harvest is in serious doubt. Yoshio

Kaneko summarized the difficulties encountered by the Japanese Government in continuing funding for the project. A consensus was reached that future trade in crocodile skins from Indonesia should be contingent upon the presence of an effective management scheme and that the FAO project seemed the main source of management guidance. Continued funding for the project is therefore a priority. With a total trade of 30,000 to 40,000 skins /year Indonesia was generating sufficient revenue to fund a substantial portion of the management costs from skin sales, as was done in many other countries. Outside seed funding of a proportion of the costs of management would be an inducement to Indonesia to tax its producers and traders and raise the necessary funds. The possibility and mechanism for CSG calling for a complete transfer of Indonesian populations to Appendix I and ending all legal trade was discussed. If possible, the FAO project should continue. Funding for the project is the joint responsibility of those benefiting from the trade, that is, the Indonesian producers and traders and the Japanese buyers. A funding proposal based on matching funds raised from revenues generated by the croc trade in Indonesia was desirable. Hard evidence of illegal trade should be reported to the CITES infractions Committee. The CSG's concern was conservation of crocodile populations and that with this in mind it would scrutinize the situation, and any CITES proposals, at the next Steering Committee meeting with the possibility of recommending a complete end to trade if necessary.

The meeting then adjourned at 10:30pm to reconvene at 11:00pm.

Thailand. Jaques Berney summarized the present position of Thailand with regard to wildlife trade. After over ten years of inadequate implementation of CITES and numerous irregularities of wildlife trade, the CITES Standing Committee recommended in April that all parties cease wildlife trade with Thailand, instituting an effective ban. Mr. Charoon Youngprapakorn expressed the great concern of the Sumatprakan Crocodile Farm, the only registered croc farm in Thailand, which was suffering severe economic stress as a result of the trade ban. He had asked Professor Messel and the CSG to intervene on behalf of the farm to alleviate the situation. Prof. Messel explained

that CSG would only consider acting if prompt and effective action was taken to upgrade the situation of crocodile conservation in Thailand. Specifically, to control the illegal trade of Appendix I species from Cambodia into Thailand, to ensure compliance of farms in Thailand to CITES regulations, to institute effective management and conservation of wild crocodiles in Thailand starting with an effective survey, and to eliminate Thailand's position in the trade in illegal skins (particularly Caiman) from other countries. It was unfortunate that a founder member and long time supporter of the CSG was bearing the economic burden of the situation but the responsibility lay with Mr. Youngprapakorn and his colleagues to put pressure on their government and other producers to improve the situation.

Discussion was held on what the CSG position would be on the farm completing contracts for croc skin sales signed but not shipped prior to the ban, and on a selective easing of trade restrictions for registered farms if necessary action was begun. New legislation is being considered by the Thai government. It was stressed that alleviation of trade restrictions could only be considered after firm evidence of improvements was visible.

Grahame Webb reported that there was intense interest and development in crocodile farming in Thailand and the newer farms had joined in an Association that intended to initiate conservation action, surveys, etc. He noted that the large trade in *C. siamensis* from Cambodia was said to come from numerous small village farms and the connection of these animals to wild stock was not known. Such small farms are also very common in Thailand. The trade ban had galvanized concern and interest in improving the situation and now was a timely point to provide aid to Thailand to achieve the necessary changes. However Prof. Messel stressed that he was unwilling to consider too rapid an alleviation of the trade restrictions as this might be misinterpreted as a softening of position and encourage a return to unacceptable trade and management practices.

Mr. Youngprapakorn responded saying that while it was hurting his family financially he agreed with the ban in principle because it had drawn the serious attention of the government to major problems and the need for change. The ban had received wide publicity in Thailand. He noted that the Sumatprakan farm has an effective

breeding program and will quickly become overcrowded if it continues its production of approximately 6000 new hatchlings a year. He has sent letters to the Prime Minister, Minister of Agriculture, the Director General of Forests and other government leaders, calling on them to fully enforce CITES. The farm was now tagging all skins to ensure legality of trade and was open to inspection by any party. Thousands of crocodiles on the farm are being tagged with microchip transponders, the first facility in the world to adopt this new technique. The farm has also suspended sales of hatchlings to new farms until the situation clarifies. The new crocodile farmers association was beginning a program to assist wildlife authorities survey wild populations and hoped to present a report at the Zimbabwe meeting.

In the following discussion these points were made, Thailand was heavily populated and limited habitat remains for wild crocodiles. It was clearly unacceptable to deplete Appendix I crocodile populations in neighboring countries to build the farms in Thailand. Many new farms may not be able to establish registered status with CITES because their stock is illegally obtained from Cambodia, although parallel situations in Africa and Singapore have been resolved in the past. The caiman trade is run by a different set of people from the crocodile farmers. In summary it was agreed that when evidence of an improvement of the situation was received, the CSG could consider recommending an easing of trade restrictions for registered farms, but that lacking such evidence, no immediate action was possible. The group agreed to reconsider the matter at the next Steering Committee meeting with whatever additional facts were at hand.

Zambia. Allegations and correspondence concerning illegal activities from some farms in Zambia were reviewed. Several private farms not involved have protested that they are being accused and penalized for activities of other government farms outside their control. It was stressed that the infractions are real and well known in the region and that failure to recognize or act upon them would destabilize confidence in CITES and in the CSG throughout Eastern Africa. CSG has recommended to CITES that an unbiased observer be sent to review the situation, however CITES is constrained because they can only send an observer at the invitation

of the country concerned, which has so far not been forthcoming. After discussion, CITES was urged to continue attempts to send an observer and the Group would defer action until more information was available.

Vietnam. Grahame Webb reported a rumor concerning the export of a number of Cuban crocodiles (*C. rhombifer*) to Vietnam. The executive officer was asked to investigate if possible during the CITES mission to Cuba planned for June.

The meeting closed at 11:40 pm. J.P. Ross, rapporteur.