

Crocodile Specialist Group Steering Committee Meeting
Chetumal International Business and Convention Centre, Chetumal, Mexico
(4 July 2022)

Minutes

SC members present in person: Alejandro Larriera, Perran Ross, Xander Combrink, Matthew Shirley, Rainier Manalo, Pablo Siroski, Hesiquio Benítez Diaz, Marisa Tellez, Luis Bassetti, Laura Porras Murillo, Carlos Piña, Alvaro Velasco, Christy Plott, Enrico Chiesa, Kent Vliet, Valentine Lance, Simone Comparini

SC members present by Zoom: Grahame Webb, Christine Lippai, Charlie Manolis, Tom Dacey, Matthew Brien, Alfonso Llobet, Allan Woodward, Curt Harbsmeier, Nathalie Kpera, Phil Wilkinson, Ruth Elsey, Colette Adams, Thomas Rainwater, Frank Mazzotti, Gowri Mallapur

Observers present in person: Kyle Shaney, Robert Godshalk, Bruce Shwedick, Bekky Muscher-Hodges, Helen Sung, Miriam Boucher, Paul Reilly, Robinson Botero Arias, Phoebe Griffith, Alba Imhoff, Treya Picking, Saiyaad Ali, Melina Simoncini, Eduardo Mosso, Iri Gill, Shawn Helflick, Jhonathan Triminio, Gabriela Lopez Jauregui, Samuel Seashole, Sol Gutierrez

Observers present by Zoom: Mitsuko Takehara, Yoichi Takehara, Noboru Ishii, Gisela Poletta, Sukanao Iida, Jose Arturo Bocanegra Martinez, Kataoka Takayuki, Lucia Fernandez

SC member apologies: Alison Leslie, Howard Kelly, Emmanuel Amoah, Lonnie McCaskill, Wu Xiaobing, Nao Thuok, Kornvika Youngprapakorn, Yosapong Temsiripong, Luke Evans, Oswald Braken Tisen, Adrian Sugiarto, Steve Platt, Jhon Calderon, Anslem de Silva, Madhava Botejue, Maheshwar Dhakal, Raju Vyas, Abdul Aleem Choudhury, Asghar Mobaraki, S.M.A. Rashid, Thomas Ziegler, Fabian Schmidt, Jeb Linscombe, Pamela Ashley, Kevin Van Jaarsveldt, Helen Crowley, John Caldwell, Cathy Shilton, Paolo Martelli, Chris Brochu, Sally Isberg

Agenda

The agenda papers for the Steering Committee meeting can be found at;
<http://www.iucncsg.org/pages/SC-Meeting%2C-Chetumal%2C-4-July-2022.html>

Minutes

Interim CSG co-Chair Alejandro Larriera opened the meeting at 1500 h (Chetumal time), thanking the sponsors and organizers, including both local and national Mexican Governments, for their efforts in arranging the meeting in the face of difficulties caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, which had caused several postponements of the meeting.

One minute silence was held for 13 CSG members who had passed away since the last working meeting in May 2018: Joseph Fagan, Manuel Tabet, Effendy Sumarja, Ernesto Boede, Giam Choo Hoo, Maria Cristina Robayo, Sergio Medrano Bitar, Mario Baudoin, Mushtaq Ahmed, Wayne Sagera, Widodo Ramono, Jerome Caraguel, Utai Youngprapakorn.

1.1. Chair's Report

The Chair Grahame Webb apologized for not being able to attend the meeting in person, and thanked Alejandro Larriera and Charlie Manolis for filling in as joint co-Chairs during his recent recovery from illness. He also thanked the hosts and organisers of this working meeting.

The Chair highlighted the following:

- The CSG, with some 710 members from 70 countries, is one of the biggest specialist groups within the Species Survival Commission, and that since the last meeting the pandemic had impacted on many of its members, including some deaths.
- Thirteen (13) members had passed away and two were expelled from the CSG since the last working meeting for breaches of the IUCN Code of Conduct.
- Since 2009, 222 students from 42 countries have been awarded SRAS and/or FHVS-SRAS grants. Some of these students are now CSG members, members of the Future Leaders Program and/or are on the CSG Steering Committee. Summary reports for completed studies are posted on the CSG website, and many have maintained their interest in crocodylians and published papers from their projects.
- Establishment of the Future Leaders Program, with Pablo Siroski as Chair, aims to enable members with demonstrated leadership abilities to strengthen their skills, become proficient in the complex world of biopolitics, and further the goals of the CSG. It is intended to get some of the Future leaders to the next CITES CoP, to be held in Panama City, on 14-25 November 2022.
- Industry Issues. Following a survey by Alan Woodward and Perran Ross, the Chair undertook to finalise a report, but this has been made more difficult because of the recent actions by animal rights activists. Matter listed for further discussion in Agenda item 3.1 Industry.
- CSG funding comes from various industry members, which is a double edge sword. However, the CSG is open and transparent and not subjected to any pressure from industry donors.
- CrocFest, headed by a small group people (Colette Adams, Flavio Morrissiey and Curt Harbsmeier), is very effective and has achieved remarkable results for crocodylian conservation.
- Case Studies document is still being developed. Delays caused by change in direction with respect to the audience for the document.
- The IUCN-SSC has established a relationship with the Indianapolis Zoo, but not sure how this will work out as many CSG members are not necessarily interested in IUCN activities. (Refer comments in Agenda item 3.6 Legal Affairs).
- The CSG Newsletter continues to be published ever quarter, thanks to the efforts of Charlie Manolis. It provides members with regular information about crocodylians, publications and CSG activities.

1.2. Minutes from SC Meeting, Santa Fe

Tom Dacey introduced the item. He undertook to provide a copy of the “CSG Targets for the 2021-2024 Quadrennium” to SC members (by time of writing of these Minutes this had been done). The report was noted.

1.3. Actions from SC Meeting, Santa Fe

Tom Dacey introduced the item. Actions from the previous SC meeting were also addressed:

1. African Survey Database: Christine Lippai advised “the general feeling is that the database structure is ‘old fashioned’ and requires a lot of effort and manpower to bring it up to modern standards. It remains an excellent historic source of information about

surveys carried out on the continent, but is not of value to incorporate recent survey information.” No further action required at this time.

2. Incorporation of contact details of CSG members on CSG website: No actions are recommended at this time - the details of Steering Committee members will remain in the CSG Newsletter as has been the case for over 18 years now. Given information on the web, locating people is much easier now.
2. Terms of Reference for Industry Group: The Chair prepared Terms of Reference for the Industry group, which were accepted by the Executive Committee, and appointed Christy Plott as the Vice Chair of the Group.
3. Future Leaders Working Group: Following the verbal report from the working group, it was confirmed that it should now become the “Future Leaders Program”, under the leadership of Pablo Siroski and Sergio Balaguera-Reina.

The report was noted.

1.4. Executive Officer Report

Tom Dacey introduced the item. The report was noted.

1.5. CSG/IACS Financial Reports

Charlie Manolis introduced the item, advising that the Auditor’s Reports for IACS would be posted on the CSG website (by time of writing of these Minutes, this had been done). He also reported that both WMI and the Executive Officer had volunteered to take a 25% reduction in their contracts due to restrictions on travel, and as a contribution to CSG during this difficult time due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

1.6. IUCN Membership 2021-2025

Tom Dacey introduced the item, advising that of the 710 “members” currently included on the CSG’s database, only 590 were registered on the IUCN portal. People who are not on the IUCN database are not formally recognized as members of the CSG (or IUCN), and they are encouraged to register as soon as possible.

1.7. SRAS and FHVS-SRAS

Charlie Manolis introduced the item advising that there had been 222 grants awarded to date, and to date only 3 applicants had failed to complete their projects. Overall the scheme has been very successful.

Matt Shirley asked whether the outcomes had resulted in publications. Charlie Manolis advised that CSG does not monitor publications produced from funded projects, in part because of the long periods of time that may exist between completion of the project and eventual publications. Students doing their project as part of a MSc or PhD typically publish, but students undertaking projects as part of their undergraduate degree do not. Many students attend working meetings, where they present their work.

Grahame Webb suggested that it might be good to do a review of publications resulting from SRAS students. He also reminded the SC that the prime purpose and focus of the scheme was to get people involved with crocodilians, not publications.

2. Regional Reports

2.1. East and Southern Africa

Xander Combrink introduced the item, highlighting:

- Madagascar: the Madagascar Crocodile Conservation and Sustainable Use Program came to an end in 2019.
- South Africa: a) decrease in wild population; b) breeders from commercial farms provided for hunting; c) increasing number of escapes from commercial farms; and, d) research postponed due to Covid-19 pandemic, beginning again.
- Namibia: research focusing on the decrease in population, while identifying the cause of the trend.
- Zimbabwe: ranching and trophy hunting of Nile crocodiles have contributed to the increase in crocodile populations. Increased HCC in fringe communities.

The report was noted.

2.2. West and Central Africa

Matt Shirley introduced the item, highlighting:

- Emmanuel Amoah (Ghana) replaced retiring regional Vice Chair Prof. Guy Apollinaire Mensah
- An increase in regional membership
- Red List assessments and Action Plans are now progressing
- New Regional Capacity-building Program for Under-represented Species (including crocodilians) is underway
- Two documentaries have been produced on African Dwarf crocodiles in Gabon
- Lots of research is being undertaken

The report was noted

2.3. East and Southeast Asia

Rainier Manalo introduced the item, highlighting:

- Cambodia - FFI involvement
- Indonesia - WCS involvement
- Laos and Vietnam - Laos Zoo
- Philippines: a) involvement of CCPI and Mabuwaya Foundation; b) development of Crocodile Conservation Action Plan in the Philippines 2023-2032; and, c) a split-listing proposal for the transfer of the Philippine population of Saltwater crocodiles (*Crocodylus porosus*) on Palawan Island, from Appendix I to Appendix II, with a zero export quota for wild specimens, has been submitted to CITES.

Charlie Manolis advised that in Cambodia and the Philippines there has been increased collaboration between farmers, Government and NGOs.

The report was noted.

2.4. Latin America and the Caribbean

Pablo Siroski introduced the item, highlighting LAC Regional Office activities and the CSG's 50th Anniversary Virtual Event

- Alvaro Velasco advised on the Report on Trade in the LAC Region for 2010-2020.
- Hesiquio Diaz advised that whilst the CSG working meeting in Chetumal had been postponed three times, he was glad the meeting had eventuated as it will engage many people from the region.
- Alfonso Llobet stressed the impact being incurred on local livelihoods and the economic incentives for local conservation in Bolivia. Charlie Manolis noted that the closure of farms and programs in the region will have impacts on livelihoods.
- Marisa Tellez provided an update on the situation in El Salvador, Honduras and Trinidad & Tobago.
- Grahame Webb indicated that: a) Mexico report raises several important issues, particularly, global recognition of local communities, biodiversity and sustainable use; b) there was an oversupply of skins in trade; c) in the Philippines, *C. porosus* farmers were funding the research on *C. mindorensis*; d) Traceability (see Agenda item 5.2) - many local communities cannot meet traceability requirements (eg PNG local communities reliant on wild harvests); and, e) CSG review of sustainable use programs is not yet finalized.

The report was noted.

2.5. South Asia and Iran

The report was noted.

2.6. Australia and Oceania

Charlie Manolis introduced the item, highlighting:

- Matthew Brian is now Regional Chair for Australia & Oceania, replacing Charlie Manolis
- The Code of Practice on the Humane Treatment of Wild and Farmed Australian Crocodiles is coming up for review
- Monitoring of the population in the Northern Territory has occurred consistently since 1975
- In Queensland, detailed information is awaited on recent population surveys and there has been increasing human-crocodile conflict over the last two decades;
- In Western Australia, there is now only one commercial farm and the population monitoring program has been reduced
- Papua New Guinea: (a) due to the international market decline, there has been an impact on the wild harvest and conservation program; (b) legislation is being reviewed; and, (c) there is concern that there may be impacts on the local harvest programs and livelihoods.
- Timor-Leste: CrocFest is funding research into whether crocodiles are coming from Australia or elsewhere, with sampling being undertaken by Sebastian Brackhane, and analysis by Australian researchers. Grahame Webb indicated that the crocodile culture beliefs of the people in Timor-Leste are changing.

- Solomon Islands: Government is currently developing a national crocodile management plan, and implement training programs.
- Palau: Has a small stable population and HCC is very uncommon.

2.7. Europe

The report was noted.

2.8. North America

Alan Woodward addressed this item, highlighting:

- Distribution of American alligators is extending north with climate change;
- Price declines for alligator skins is affecting the nuisance alligator program and trappers are seeking assistance funds from Government;
- There has been a decline in the harvest of alligators and eggs;
- Research projects: a) report on the effects of translocation due out soon; b) caiman removal program by Frank Mazzotti.

Ruth Elsey thanked everyone for their contributions to the Louisiana report, and highlighted:

- Surveys
- Reduction in nesting
- Lower prices for skins and effect on trappers

The report was noted.

3. Thematic Group Reports

3.1. Industry

Christy Plott addressed this item, and highlighted:

- Conservation, sustainable use, livelihoods and the industry are intimately linked to each other for many species of crocodilian
- Luxury markets only want perfect skins. Brands have tightened quality requirements
- Wild skin markets remain bleak
- Demand for meat, globally, has eclipsed the demand for skins
- California issue - it is recommended that industry should:
 - (a) increase communication on sustainability, animal welfare, conservation, and alignment with United Nations Sustainable Development Goals industry-wide
 - (b) explore new markets for low-medium grade farmed and wild skins
 - (c) decrease raw skin production, where possible, in order to discourage a global price crash
 - (d) tanners and traders should collaborate to sell old stock of crust and finished leather
 - (e) farms should aim to sell skins as quickly as possible due to tanning issues with old skins
 - (g) implement strict policies internally (and amongst various associations) at the trapper, farm, tannery, manufacturers, and brand/retail store levels for compliance with CITES regulations.

- (h) aim to increase education on CITES procedures amongst small artisans and cottage businesses to decrease violations globally on single item shipments.

The report was noted.

3.2. Trade Monitoring

The report was noted.

3.3. Veterinary Science

Gowri Mallapur addressed this item. The report was noted.

3.4. Zoos

Kent Vliet addressed this item and highlighted:

- Colette Adams is now a Vice Chair for the Zoo Group
- Israel asking for assistance in re-homing 700 Nile crocodiles from the Pezael Crocodile Farm that had closed
- Cooperative project between Dr. Matt Shirley (Project Mecistops), Albuquerque BioPark Zoo, and the staff and administrators of Abidjan Zoo
- Activities in European zoos (see Agenda item 2.7)
- Zoo Animal of the Year
- Zoos funding *in-situ* projects
- St. Augustine Alligator Farm research contributions
- St. Louis Zoo Cuban crocodiles
- CrocFest fundraising events

The report was noted.

3.5. Taxonomy

Kent Vliet addressed this item and highlighted:

- Problems being experienced in moving tissue samples (eg CITES and other management authorities)
- Definition of “species”
- Sorting out caiman taxa

Hesiquio Diaz advised that there is a need to be very careful when advising CITES on taxonomic issues.

The report was noted.

3.6. Legal Affairs

Curt Harbsmeier addressed this item, and highlighted:

- CSG has not been a party to any litigation over the past 3 years
- Christy Plott’s involvement in the California issue was much appreciated

- Alligator situation in the USA: a) permits increased in Florida; and, b) extended hunting hours
- Amazon Smile as a fund-raising tool for CSG
- Renewed focus on ethical considerations
- IUCN World Commission on Environmental Law (WCEL)
- Indianapolis Zoo and IUCN-SSC create new Global Center for Species Survival

The report was noted.

3.7. IUCN Red List Authority

Perran Ross advised that Sally Isberg has taken over responsibility for the Red List Authority. To date 7 species have been submitted to the IUCN Red List Team; 3 more are pending; and, 2 others are almost ready to submit. The report was noted.

3.8. CITES

Charlie Manolis advised that three “crocodilian” proposals were submitted for consideration to CoP19 (Panama, 14-25 November 2022):

1. Brazil: Transfer of *Caiman latirostris* from Appendix I to Appendix II. This proposal was not provided to CSG for review.
2. Philippines: Transfer of Palawan population of *Crocodylus porosus* from Appendix I to Appendix II, with zero export quota for wild specimens. The draft proposal was reviewed by CSG.
3. Thailand: Transfer of *Crocodylus siamensis* from Appendix I to Appendix II, with zero quota for export of wild specimens. The draft proposal was reviewed by CSG. The proposal is similar to previous, unsuccessful proposal at CoP16. The problem is that a very large captive population is being managed as an Appendix-I species, and wild population is very small.

Grahame Webb advised that previously the CSG was opposed to trade in crocodilians, however, there has been a quantum shift and the CSG now assists proponents with development of proposals. CSG has been asked by IUCN/TRAFFIC to provide comments of these proposals. Any feedback would be appreciated, but there is a tight timeline.

Matt Shirley advised that CITES is organizing workshops on “non-detriment findings”, and that CSG should be represented. Grahame Webb suggested that he and Matt should have further discussions on this issue.

The report was noted.

4. Task Force/Working Groups

4.1. Future Leaders Program

Pablo Siroski addressed this item highlighting:

- Restructuring process has been implemented

- Some FLs were represented as part of official IUCN delegation at CoP18 (Geneva, Switzerland, 17-28 August 2019), and attended a number of side-events on conservation, sustainable use, and livelihoods
- FLs provided an important review and some feedback on a critical endangered species, *Tomistoma schlegelii*
- FLs involved in the development of “Traceability in Crocodylian Conservation and Management”

The report was noted.

4.2. Drone Working Group

A workshop was held prior to the Chetumal Working Meeting. The report was noted.

5. General Business

5.1. IUCN World Conservation Congress

The report was noted.

5.2. Traceability

The report was noted.

5.3. Case Studies

The proposed Case Studies document is still being developed. The report was noted.

6. 27th CSG Working Meeting

The 27th Working Meeting will be held in Darwin, Northern Territory, Australia, tentatively scheduled for early June 2024.

Grahame Webb commented that we are now good at participating in Zoom meetings, and it will no doubt become a feature of future meetings. CSG meetings give people the opportunity to meet and discuss issues with each other, apart from the formal agenda. There is a need to make it more worthwhile for people to travel and participate in face-to-face meetings.

7. Other Business

7.1. CSG Science Group

Carlos Piña suggested that consideration be given to re-establishing the Science thematic group. It was agreed that the matter be discussed out of session during the Working Meeting and a recommendation be made to the CSG Executive Committee for consideration.