

Crocodile Specialist Group Steering Committee Meeting
Sofitel Royal Bay Hotel, Agadir, Morocco
(12 May 2026)

Young Professionals Task Force

The IUCN SSC Young Professionals Task Force (YPTF) aims to “engage, support, and develop young professionals’ expertise in research, policy-making, conservation planning, and implementation of multilateral environmental agreements in Red List Authorities and Taxonomic Groups”, as well as to implement the IUCN Youth Strategy (2022-2030). According to the IUCN Youth Strategy, Young Professionals need to be embedded in every level of decision making and be found working in every commission. Thus, the YPTF seeks to ensure that young professionals build capacity for functioning in taxonomic groups.

Definitions: Young Professionals are people aged between 18-35 years. This is related to the general concept within the IUCN of “young people”, which would also include youth, who are people aged between 15-24 years. Both are considered in the IUCN Youth Strategy (2022-2030), which seeks to “amplify young voices and actions that will determine much about the natural world they inherit from current generations”.

Priority actions from Youth Strategy: Of the short-term priority actions of the Youth Strategy, Commission Goal 1.1 is to “enhance the role of young professionals in Commissions by improving their representation in thematic/specialist groups, by creating roles at the leadership level as well as by nominating young professional focal points”. Commission Goal 1.2 is to “offer capacity building (formal/informal) for young professionals on policy, procedures, strategic planning, etc. within the Union, including through two-way mentoring”.

For the CSG, the goal of nominating young professional focal points has been achieved by the nomination of Brinky Desai and Phoebe Griffith, who are the focal points on the Steering Committee, as well as part of the team of the YPTF. To maintain that such a role provides both representation for Young Professionals, as well as a capacity building opportunity for the focal points, they propose that this is a time-limited role, with an approximately 4-year tenure. They propose that replacements should be nominated and role handed over before the Steering Committee Meeting in 2030.

More broadly, the CSG already has a considerable membership of Young Professionals and has in the past had its own YPTF-like initiative with the “Future Leaders Program”. This program was dissolved at the 27th Steering Committee Meeting having met its goals and many of the program's participants now in CSG leadership roles. However, these members are now outside of the “young professionals” age category meaning that representation of Young Professionals in senior or leadership roles is again limited. Consequently, with respect to the Youth Strategy Commission Goals 1.1 and 1.2, it would be good to establish an accessible method for communication of (or where necessary, establish) the processes within the CSG for:

- (a) Identification of CSG member Young Professionals to the focal points, to facilitate additional opportunities and feedback to the YPTF and CSG;
- (b) Young Professionals to build capacity to eventually step into leadership roles, including as Regional Chairs and within Thematic Groups; and,
- (c) Young Professionals to take part in capacity building, but also to provide capacity, for CSG and CSG-led activities. This could include IUCN actions such as Red Listing, as well as linked activities such as CITES involvement or report production.

Of the short-term priority actions of the Youth Strategy, Commission Goal 2.1-2.3 generally apply more broadly at the Commission level, and can be summarised as promoting intergenerational partnerships, knowledge sharing and culture of collaboration, networking and knowledge sharing events and intergenerational dialogues, and support and opportunities for young people.

The CSG already has multiple mechanisms for including Young Professionals at a pre-membership and ‘first steps’ career stage. These involve the Student Research Assistance Scheme (SRAS), which provides financial, mentoring and networking support to students. In addition, the YPTF focal points have set up the Early Career Croc Network (ECCN). This is an informal group that meet online for networking, capacity building, and for webinars with experts in the field, many of whom are typically CSG members. Feedback from Young Professionals in the CSG and ECCN has highlighted there is an active and supportive network provided by the CSG membership, supported by the Executive and Steering Committees. Ongoing support includes mentorship, advice, professional contacts, training opportunities, and funding initiatives such as SRAS. Several members noted that participation in CSG activities and meetings helped them advance their careers, publish their work, and gain international exposure. Additionally, members of the ECCN (of which ~50% are CSG members) emphasized that ECCN has provided a welcoming and supportive global community where young professionals can exchange ideas, discuss research challenges, and learn from experienced crocodylian specialists. The

regular seminars and discussions were frequently mentioned as valuable opportunities to gain knowledge, inspiration, and receive practical guidance. Members also appreciated the networking opportunities offered by ECCN, which have helped them connect with peers and senior researchers, develop research ideas, and in some cases, establish collaborations. Greater intergenerational dialogues, perhaps as part of a future working meeting, to facilitate learning from more experienced and senior CSG members in a structured way could be an excellent way to ensure both intergenerational and international knowledge exchange. Furthermore, the contribution of senior CSG members to ECCN webinars has been hugely valuable in 2022-2026, and future sessions with more CSG members are warmly invited. Overall, Young Professional CSG and ECCN members expressed strong appreciation for both the CSG and associated ECCN remarking that these platforms have significantly contributed to building capacity, fostering collaboration, and strengthening the global community of early-career crocodylian researchers and conservationists.

A major limiting challenge identified by Young Professionals in the CSG, as well as those members of the ECCN who would like to join the CSG in future, is the financial difficulty of attending CSG working meetings. For example, the costs of registration for the 2026 meeting have been highlighted as a prohibitive cost by multiple Young Professional (current and aspiring CSG members) who are therefore unable to attend. Specific calls for financial support for Young Professionals to apply to, especially for regional attendees (ie the current meeting is in Africa, so for African Young Professionals), have been suggested as a beneficial way to enhance inclusion. Reduced fees for Young Professionals (i.e. not only students), especially from low- or middle-income countries may be mechanisms to facilitate inclusive access to early career crocodylian professionals.

Feedback highlighted additional future hopes for increasing practical opportunities and accessibility for Early-Career and Young Professionals. These included the potential for additional support to acquire funding such as small grants, and expanded training opportunities through workshops, field courses, and hands-on experiences such as capture techniques, tagging, monitoring, and field survey methods. Practical training opportunities with crocodylians are unevenly distributed geographically, and many Young Professionals highlight the difficulties of obtaining the practical skills necessary for crocodylian work in underrepresented regions. An additional suggestion was the creation of a formalized system of one-on-one mentorship with senior experts (separate from the SRAS mentoring offered in the application) that could help Young Professionals to plan their careers and develop strong research skills to advance crocodylian conservation. It was suggested that additional mechanisms for communication of opportunities could be beneficial, including a section on the website for the sharing of job vacancies, grants, internships, and research collaborations.

Greater regional networking, facilitated by both virtual and in-person meetings, was highlighted as a regionally-led activity that would be welcomed by, and could be supported by capacity from, Young Professionals.

In summary, increased financial support for attending meetings, structured mentorship, and improved access to opportunities, especially those in practical training, are identified as important ways to support the next generation of crocodylian researchers and conservation practitioners, and could enhance the already excellent opportunities the CSG provides.

Actions of CSG members to build capacity and experience of Young Professionals: We report here on collaborative activities by CSG members that seek to improve early-career opportunities for Young Professionals starting in a career with crocodylians. Activities directly led by the CSG or focal points (ie SRAS and ECCN) are not included.

- The European Croc Networking Meeting took place in 2026 in Berlin, hosted by the IGB and Berlin Zoo and Aquarium. Details are given in the Europe regional report. Specifically related to Young Professionals, the meeting provided three free places to Young Professionals, and offered two grants to support attendance.
- The Wetlands and Integrated Study of Ecology (WISE) Lab, and the Clemson University Belle W. Baruch Institute of Coastal Ecology and Forest Science (BICEFS), in collaboration with the European Croc Network, will host a five-day hands-on workshop in April 2026 to provide capacity building opportunities for Young Professionals and early career students and researchers based in Europe.

Reports of Young Professionals current crocodylian projects: we attach a short list of Young Professionals currently working on crocodylian projects. We include a representative list from both CSG and ECCN members to highlight the breadth of Young Professional-led projects currently ongoing.

Updates from current Young Professionals and/or early career CSG members:

- **Herdhanu Jayanto - East and Southeast Asia.** Conducted the first GPS/satellite tracking of wild *Tomistoma* in Indonesia. Studied adult home ranges while involving students and stakeholders.
- **Miriam Boucher - North America.** Studying contaminants such as microplastics and PFAS in American alligators. Using alligators as biomonitors of environmental health. Previous and current CSG SRAS recipient.
- **María Catalina Pinzón Barrera - Latin America and the Caribbean.** Monitoring Orinoco crocodylians and human interactions. Developing coexistence protocols and national databases. Previous CSG SRAS recipient.
- **Meljory D. Corvera - East and Southeast Asia.** Participates in crocodylian surveys and training programs in the Philippines. Maintains the national human-crocodylian conflict database.
- **Brian Martin - East and Southeast Asia.** Developing crocodylian research projects and seeking funding. Preparing for future fieldwork and conservation activities.

- **Charles Edward - West and Central Africa.** Conducted surveys on African dwarf crocodiles in Sapo National Park. Assessed distribution and conservation needs.
- **Jailabdeen A - South Asia and Iran.** Leading long-term ecological research on gharials in the Chambal River. Working with forest departments on conservation actions. Previous CSG SRAS recipient.
- **Simon Booth - Australia and Oceania.** Working on eDNA detection of saltwater crocodiles. Research includes contaminants, conflict mitigation, and monitoring technologies.
- **James Szewczyk - Europe.** Co-organising the European Crocodile Networking Meeting and field workshops. Developing and testing innovative crocodile capture methods.
- **Bilal Mustafa - South Asia and Iran.** Studying historical distribution and cultural importance of gharials. Developed extinction timelines across the Indus Basin.
- **Gaurav Vashistha - South Asia and Iran.** Working on gharial and saltwater crocodile conservation projects in India. Involved in monitoring and management initiatives. Previous CSG SRAS recipient.
- **Kasahun Delene Deyassa - East and Southern Africa.** Working on Nile crocodile conservation at Arba Minch Crocodile Ranch. Supporting long-term management activities. Previous CSG SRAS recipient.
- **Bobby Greco - North America.** Conservation and research on *Crocodylus acutus* in the Dominican Republic (full report to Regional Chair). Previous and current CSG SRAS recipient.
- **Paulo Braga Mascarenhas Junior - Latin America and the Caribbean.** Researching caiman population dynamics and urbanisation effects. Studying human–crocodile conflicts in coastal habitats.
- **Divya Bhattarai - South Asia and Iran.** Continuing mugger research projects in Nepal. Working on follow-up studies in Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve.
- **Patrick Hennessey - Europe.** PhD research on giant crocodile biology using museum collections. Studying skull morphology and evolutionary patterns.
- **Cristian Pizzigalli - West and Central Africa.** Researching *Crocodylus suchus* populations using molecular ecology. Studying genetic diversity and connectivity across desert regions. Previous CSG SRAS recipient.

Updates from current Young Professional and/or early career ECCN members:

- **Bishal Prasad Neupane - South Asia and Iran.** Working on crocodylian research and awareness programs in Nepal. Promotes conservation and tourism linked to Gharials and Muggers.
- **Mehul Singh Tomar - South Asia and Iran.** Conducting ecological studies on crocodylian populations. Using field-based methods to improve understanding of species ecology.
- **Megha Khanduri - South Asia and Iran/Europe.** Completed doctoral research on light pollution impacts on gharials. Studied behavioural responses and habitat-level light exposure in the Ganga Basin.
- **Ranjana Bhatta - South Asia and Iran.** Monitoring Gharial reproduction in Narayani-Rapti and Karnali Rivers. Conducting community-based conservation activities.
- **Josh Dregalla - North America.** Developing a crocodylian parasite database. Studying evolutionary relationships of crocodylian parasites
- **Sabina Shakya - South Asia and Iran.** Conducting Gharial and Mugger conservation and coexistence research. Leading awareness and community outreach programs. Current CSG SRAS recipient.
- **Hayley Sprawling - Europe.** Working in crocodylian husbandry and enclosure design. Managing Tomistoma and caiman species in zoological facilities.
- **Ashaharraza Khan Zakir Khan - South Asia and Iran.** Building experience in crocodile and Gharial surveys and field protocols. Developing research and monitoring skills.
- **Shricharan Desai - South Asia and Iran.** Monitoring Mugger crocodile populations in Goa and nearby regions. Studying human-crocodile interaction patterns.
- **Milena Bors - South Asia and Iran/West and Central Africa.** Working on genetic diversity and connectivity of mugger crocodiles in India. Planning habitat conservation research in West Africa.

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