Winter CrocFest 2018 Report
A Festival for Crocodilian Conservation
$42K for the Gharial Ecology Project!

Winter CrocFest 2018 took place on 8 Dec 2018 at Gatorama in Palmdale, Florida, USA. Attendance exceeded 300 individuals, including world-famous conservationist Rom Whitaker from India, well known crocodile biologist Jeff Lang, PhD, long recognized for his groundbreaking work with Indian Gharial, and CSG Chairman and world-renowned conservationist Grahame Webb, PhD! Also in attendance were Chairman of the AZA Crocodilian Advisory Group Kent Vliet, PhD, and head of the University of Florida’s Croc Docs Frank Mazzotti, PhD.

The beneficiary of this installment of CrocFest is the Gharial, more specifically the Gharial Ecology Project (“GEP”) headed by Dr. Jeff Lang. The funds raised will serve to continue the GEP’s research with Gharial on the Chambal River and recently expanded into Nepal.

Winter CrocFest 2018 raised $41,776 (USD). As of February 2019, thanks to the generosity and commitment of the private sector, zoos, academia, and corporate sponsors, CrocFest fundraisers have generated nearly $400,000 (USD) for in situ crocodilian conservation projects worldwide. CrocFest has NO employees and no paid workers... every person involved is a volunteer. All funds are collected and accounted for by Gladys Porter Zoo in Brownsville, Texas. 100% of all donations go directly to crocodile conservation, with event expenses covered by event organizers and sponsors.

Event organizers were: Curt Harbsmeier, Executive Board Member -- ZooTampa at Lowry Park; Flavio Morrissiey, Operations Director -- You Name It Tours; and Colette Adams, Deputy Director -- Gladys Porter Zoo.

CrocFest fundraisers are family-friendly events geared to increase awareness of and raise money for international crocodile conservation. Event-goers were treated to alligator and crocodile feeding demonstrations, tours of Gatorama’s exhibits, a barbeque dinner prepared by Robbie’s Real Pit BBQ and sponsored by Brian and Deana Love, and wine provided by Teo Bosciano of Tampa. As always, the evening wound up with a rousing live auction conducted by Phil Goss (USARK) and well-known Florida naturalist, Joe Wasilewski.

About our Host: Gatorama is one of Florida’s few remaining “Original Roadside Attractions,” and it is owned by IUCN-SSC Crocodile Specialist Group (“CSG”) member Allen Register and his wife Patty. It features many species of crocodilians, including a large number of American alligators exceeding 3 to 4 meters in length, and the largest group of American crocodiles in captivity. The Registers went above and beyond to make CrocFest feel at home and ensure that all attendees had a great time at their facility.

Special thanks are owed Kyle Asplundh, who, once again, generously donated a significant cash contribution. We are also grateful to Brian and Deana Love, ZooTampa at Lowry Park, the AZA Crocodile Advisory Group, the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), Ft. Worth Zoo, San Antonio Zoo, and the Henry Doorly Zoo for their very generous cash donations. We are grateful to Albuquerque Zoo, who lent us the invaluable services of Katie Anderson for the event. To Terry Cullen for a significant donation. And to Crocstar Troy Lillie for the t-shirt design and artwork!
We would like to express our deep appreciation to our sponsors and major donors. Without their support, we could not sustain the growth this event has enjoyed over the years. **Our sponsors and major donors for Winter CrocFest 2018 were:**

We must also thank all of the MANY individuals, businesses and zoos that supported this fundraising event, including but not limited to:

Meghan Padgett  
Megan Terry  
Joe Wasilewski  
Allen & Patty Register, Gatorama  
Phil Goss, USARK  
Wendy Eddinger  
Kyle Asplundh  
Brian & Deana Love, Love’s Reptiles LLC  
AZA’s Crocodilian Advisory Group  
Mark & Kim Bell, Reptile Industries  
Timberline, Todd Goodman  
ExoTerra, Steve Sotello  
Zilla, Ryan McVeigh  
ZooMed, Rita Zarate  
Alvaro Velasco Barbieri  
Grahame Webb, PhD  
Jeff Lang, PhD  
Patty Scanlan  
The Exotic Kingdom  
Donald Oriolo  
Katie Stoltz  
Dino Ferri  
Rom Whitaker  
The Croc Docs  
Tom Crutchfield  
Clint Guadiana  
Terry Cullen  
J. Jones  
Kieran Tears  
Claire Hickman  
Wayne Hill  
David Kledzik, KledCo  
Crocstar Troy Lilly  
Ty Park  
Theresa Moran  
Emily Maple  
StarBorn Reptiles, Dave Morningstar  
Kent Vliet  
Charred & Bone  
Mazuri, Mark Dennison  
Everglades Holiday Park  
Fred Grunwald  
Swamp Brothers  
Marc Cantos, The Turtle Source  
Matt Shirley  
Gatorland, Mark McHugh  
Ruth Elsey  
John Heidecker & Jason Abels  
Punk Rock Herping, Jeff Goldblatt  
Mike Lloret  
Wild Florida Airboats  
Bruce Shwedick  
Emily Hutchison  
Kevin Zimmer  
Jenna Cole  
ZooTampa, Dr. Larry Killmar and Dan Costell  
St. Augustine Alligator Farm, John Brueggen  
Brevard Zoo, Keith Winston and Jon Brangan  
Virginia Aquarium, Mark Swingle and Chip Harshaw  
San Antonio Zoo, Alan Kardon and Craig Pelke  
Jacksonville Zoo,  
Tony Vecchio, Dan Maloney and John Lukas  
Busch Gardens  
Fort Worth Zoo, Michael Fouraker and Tarren Wagener  
Oklahoma City Zoo, Dwight Lawson and Barry Downer  
Mote Aquarium, Brian Siegel  
Zoo Miami, Carol Kruse  
Omaha’s Henry Doorly Zoo, Jessi Krebs  
Bronx Zoo, Don Boyer and Kevin Torregrosa  
World of Nature, Naples, Florida  
Alligator Adventure, Thad Bowman  
Hot Box Incubators and C Serpents, Chris Nettles

Please join us on 7 December 2019 at St. Augustine Alligator Farm in St. Augustine, Florida for Winter CrocFest 2019!!
ABOUT THE PROJECT:

GHARIAL ECOLOGY PROJECT 2019—2020


The Gharial Ecology Project (GEP) was initially formed to investigate the mass die-off of 110+ gharials in the 2-4m size class along the lower Chambal River, National Chambal Sanctuary (NCS). Famed gharial conservationists Jeff Lang and Rom Whitaker, joined by many others, worked together to determine the cause of the die off. Thereafter, they began monitoring the gharial population in the lower Chambal, and their work has continued ever since. Presently, the Chambal gharial represent ~85% of the global population.

The GEP has tracked 85+ radio-tagged gharials successfully through the annual monsoon and dry periods, for an average of 2+ years/animal, from June 2008 through November 2018. This research has shown that individual gharials show different patterns of seasonal movement and residency, dependent on size/age. Adult females move as far as 80-220+ km each to join dry season basking and breeding aggregations (>60 adults) and to locate suitable nesting areas. In contrast, sub-adult gharials move very little, only 10-30 km seasonally, and occupy residencies ranging only from 5-15 km.

Most sub-adult gharials are sedentary, virtually not moving either upstream or downstream at any time. In 2017, project continuation was approved to provide a comprehensive picture of the spatial and reproductive ecology of gharial and mugger living in the NCS. Major support from the City of Prague / Prague Zoo has funded the project in recent years and has continued through 2018. Comprehensive surveys in 2017 & 2018 indicate that the total adult population exceeds 550, and total population is 1650-2000 individuals. In 2018, an estimated total of 450 nests were laid in >400 km of the National Chambal Sanctuary.

The overall study will demonstrate that individual gharials utilize the entire river for specific habitats as well as corridors, and aims to provide baseline information on the status of gharial populations within the NCS. There is now wide recognition of the significance of the biological findings of the Gharial Ecology Project, and in particular, how these inform and are directly relevant to ongoing conservation and management efforts.

The success of efforts to-date to continue the study attest to the commitment by in-country state and central governments, particularly the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, the Government of India, and the State Forest Departments of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh, to the shared objectives of this joint project. This has been truly groundbreaking research, as the GEP has discovered far more evidence about the ecology and life history of the gharial over the last 10 years than was previously ever known.

Jeffrey Lang, PhD, our project beneficiary lead, is a conservation biologist with a distinguished career in crocodile research. He has been senior scientific advisor to the Madras Crocodile Bank since 1980, and to the Gharial Ecology Project since 2008. He was an Adjunct Professor with the University of Minnesota from 2003–2016, and is Professor Emeritus at the University of North Dakota (1980–2018).
Grahame Webb and Romulus Whitaker presented with Ralf Sommerlad Crocodile Conservation Awards!

Winter CrocFest 2018 recognized Dr. Grahame Webb and Rom Whitaker for their longstanding commitment and contributions to crocodilian captive husbandry and conservation with the presentation of the Ralf Sommerlad Crocodile Conservation Award.

Ralf Sommerlad was a world renowned crocodilian expert. He was among a small group of us who, in 2009, first envisioned backyard BBQ’s as a fundraising tool for crocodilian conservation. From that idea, CrocFest was born. It is with honor and respect that we celebrate the Ralf Sommerlad Crocodile Conservation Award. This award is presented annually to an individual or organization for outstanding commitment and contributions to crocodilian captive husbandry and conservation... both areas of great importance to Ralf and all of us.

Romulus (Rom) Whitaker is an Indian herpetologist, wildlife conservationist and founder of the Madras Snake Park, the Madras Crocodile Bank Trust (which has produced thousands of captive bred hatchling crocodilians), and the Andaman and Nicobar Environment Trust.

In 2005 he was awarded the Whitley Award for outstanding leadership in nature conservation. He subsequently founded the Agumbe Rainforest Research Station in Karnataka for the study of King Cobras and their habitat.

In 2008, he was selected as an Associate Laureate in the 2008 Rolex Awards for Enterprise for his efforts to create a network of rainforest research stations throughout India. Most recently, in 2018, he was awarded India’s fourth highest civilian award, the Padma Shri.

Rom Whitaker

Grahame Webb, PhD, Chairman of the IUCN-SSC Crocodile Specialist Group, is one of the world’s leading authorities on crocodilian research and management and the concept of conserving wildlife through sustainable use programs.

In 1978, Grahame founded Wildlife Management International (WMI), focusing on the conservation and management of wildlife species worldwide.

In 1994, Grahame and WMI opened “Crocodile Park”, a crocodile research and education center in Darwin, Australia. There, Grahame has overseen the care and maintenance of thousands of captive crocodilians and other species. Crocodile Park represents WMI’s commitment to public education concerning wildlife conservation and sustainable use.

Grahame Webb, PhD

Please join CrocFest in congratulating Rom and Grahame for their commitment to crocodilian captive husbandry and conservation.
Grahame Webb, PhD addresses the crowd before the auction begins

Up for bid - Claire Hickman displays her original artwork*

Colette Adams displays original line drawing by Alvaro Velasco, autographed by Grahame Webb, Jeff Lang and Rom Whitaker*

Joe Wasilewski, Gretchen Lang & Jeff Lang, PhD

American crocodile, basking at Gatorama during the festivities
Jimmy Riffle, Flavio Morrissiye & Jose Novo exchanging war stories

USARK president, Phil Goss, at the auction block . . . awesome*

Brian Love & Ty Park pose with the biggest auction item of the night – pop art original of Felix the Cat by famous artist, Donald Oriolo. Thanks guys!
Allan (Woody) Woodward & Gatorama host, Allen Register

Gatorama's CrocFest hostess, Patty Register*

Original artwork, created specifically for CrocFest, by Katie Stoltz*
CrocFest aficionados: Matt Shirley, PhD, Lauren Gruny, Michael Malden, Michelle Mark & David Kledzick

At right:
Representing many years of Florida herpers . . . Curt Harbsmeier, Tom Crutchfield, Wayne Hill & Bill Nowling

Below:
Caiman latirostris, donated by Terry Cullen & the Dragonwood Conservancy

*Photo credit: Pennybaker Wedding Photography