**Summer CrocFest 2017** took place on Saturday, 24 June 2017 at Busch Wildlife Sanctuary in Jupiter, Florida, attracting over 280 attendees, and raising over $46,000.00 USD for crocodile conservation! The beneficiary was designated as the critically endangered Cuban crocodile, *Crocodylus rhombifer*, in Zapata Swamp, Cuba. Proceeds from the event, along with proceeds from the upcoming **Winter CrocFest**, will be transferred to Natalia Rossi, PhD, with Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS). Dr. Rossi is working with Frank Mazzotti, PhD, University of Florida, Ft. Lauderdale Research and Education Center (*the Croc Docs!*), and Toby Ramos, PhD, Manolito Tabet, PhD, and a large team of crocodile biologists in Cuba. Together, the group will conduct a comprehensive conservation program that includes genetic analysis, reintroduction, monitoring, protection, and public awareness. See below for more details about the project.

Event organizers were: Curt Harbsmeier, Executive Board Member – Tampa’s Lowry Park Zoo; Flavio Morrissiey, Operations Director – You Name It Tours; Kenan Harkin, owner and operator – Kamp Kenan; and Colette Adams, General Curator - 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 live music by the *Casey Raines Band* as they toured the grounds of Busch Wildlife Sanctuary. There were live animal presentations by Luis Caraballo of *Birds & Exotics of the World*, Nathan Sweeting of *Smooth Waters Wildlife Park*, and Terry Cullen of *Dragonwood Conservancy*. A contingent of world-renowned Cuban crocodile experts, including Toby Ramos, Rey Estrada, Roberto Soberon and Gabriel Brull Puebla kept the fundraising momentum going. The live auction was conducted by first-time auctioneer, Kenan Harkin!

Thanks to the generosity and commitment of the private sector, zoos, and corporate sponsors all working together, as of September 2017, *CrocFest* fundraisers have generated over $280,000 USD for crocodiles in peril! All proceeds go directly to crocodile projects, with event expenses covered by event organizers and sponsors.

We would like to express our deep appreciation to our corporate sponsors. Without their support, we could not sustain the growth this event has enjoyed over the past seven years. **Our sponsors for Summer CrocFest 2017 were:**
Special thanks to Carl and Kyle Asplundh for their significant cash contributions! We are also grateful to Frank Mazzotti & the CrocDocs, Robbie B. Roepstorff, Robert & Phyllis Comeau and Ellen Trout Zoo for noteworthy cash donations. And to Troy Lilly and Crocstar for the substantial donation of Cuban crocodile Crocfest t-shirts!

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

- Flavio Morrissiey
- Curt Harbsmeier
- Colette Adams
- Kenan Harkin
- Wendy Eddinger
- Kendra Eddinger
- Meghan Padgett
- Megan Terry
- Kyle Asplundh
- Carl Asplundh
- Mark & Kim Bell, Reptile Industries
- ZooMed
- The Croc Docs
- Bill & Cynthia Zeigler
- Sonny’s BBQ
- Tom Crutchfield
- The Casey Raines Band
- David Kledzik, Indigenous Art
- Troy Lilly, CrocStar
- Terry Vandeveerter, ABS Master Smith
- Ty Park
- Sawgrass Recreational Park
- Toby Ramos
- Rey Estrada
- Luis Caraballo
- Sergio & Venetia Gonzalez
- Justin Miller
- Animals Anonymous
- Robby Keszey
- Marc Cantos, The Turtle Source
- Bill Montgomery
- Randal Berry
- Wilda DuBose
- Terry Cullen, Dragonwood Conservancy
- Mote Marine Lab
- Diedre Zinn Tattoos
- Joe Waslewski
- Claire Hickman
- Terrestrial & Arboreal
- Wild Florida Airboats
- Jeff Fobb
- Chris DeLory
- Phil Goss, USARK
- Bruce Shwedick
- Greene Wildlife Experience
- Matt Shirley
- Kent Vliet
- Melissa Dolinsky
- Troy Quick
- Jeff Wells
- Mark Perry
- Emily Hutchinson
- Alba Imof
- Kliebert’s Alligator Farm
- Lois Frutiger
- John Than
- Jack Facente, Agritoxins
- Russ Johnson, Phoenix Herp Society
- Paul Bodnar
- Norman Benoit
- Alejandro Grajal
- Jennifer Pramuk
- Three Jay’s Tortoise Sanctuary,
  Jason Abels and John Heidecker
- Crocodile Conservation Institute, Dr. Sam Seashole
- Busch Wildlife Sanctuary
- Black Hills Reptile Gardens, Terry Phillip
- Gatorland, Mark McHugh
- Tampa’s Lowry Park Zoo, Dr. Larry Killmar
- Zoo Miami, Carol Kruse
- St. Augustine Alligator Farm,
  David Drysdale and John Brueggen
- Ft. Worth Zoo, Mike Fouraker and Tarren Wagener
- Brevard Zoo, Keith Winston and Jon Brangan
- Dallas World Aquarium, Luis Sigler
- Virginia Aquarium, Mark Swingle and Chip Harshaw
- Jacksonville Zoo,
  Tony Vecchio, Dan Maloney and John Lukas
- Florida Aquarium, John Than
- Gatorama, Allen, Patty, and Ben Register
- Busch Gardens, Mike Malden
- Palm Beach Zoo, Emily Maple
- Oklahoma City Zoo,
  Dwight Lawson and Barry Downer
- Wildlife Discovery Center, Rob Carmichael
- Alligator Adventure, Ken Alfieri
- Ellen Trout Zoo, Gordon Henley
- Capital of Texas Zoo, Michael Hicks
Natalia Rossi, PhD, presented with the first Rafael Crespo Conservation Award at Summer CrocFest!

Dr. Natalia Rossi accepts the inaugural Rafael Crespo Conservation Award from Dr. Frank Mazzotti during an emotion-filled presentation at Summer CrocFest 2017.

Rafael Crespo was a young, dedicated crocodile biologist who worked with Frank Mazzotti at the University of Florida, Ft. Lauderdale Research and Education Center as a member of the Croc Docs. He always dreamed of working with Cuban crocodiles. In his memory, the first Rafael Crespo Conservation Award was bestowed upon Natalia Rossi of WCS. Rafael’s family was in attendance to celebrate seeing Rafael’s legacy carried forward through Natalia’s work.

Venetia Briggs Gonzalez, Rafael Crespo’s mother, Natalia Rossi, & Dr. Frank Mazzotti, during the presentation of the award.
William F. Zeigler presented with the Ralf Sommerlad Crocodile Conservation Award

At Summer CrocFest 2017, the 2017 Ralf Sommerlad Crocodile Conservation Award was presented to world-renowned zooman, Bill Zeigler.

It is with honor and respect that CrocFest recognizes Bill Zeigler for his outstanding commitment and contributions to crocodilian captive husbandry and conservation!

Bill is the Senior Vice President of Animal Programs at Chicago’s Brookfield Zoo - their top animal man. He is among the most experienced zoo animal folks in the world and he is also a member of the IUCN-SSC Crocodile Specialist Group. Crocodiles are among his primary interests.

Bill began his career at Crandon Park Zoo in Miami in 1975. During his time there, he was responsible for the zoo’s crocodile program, and oversaw the first successful breeding of both Orinoco crocodiles and Siamese crocodiles in North America!

Bill supervised the Zoo’s move to the current Zoo Miami site from 1979 to 1982, while successfully breeding the African slender-snouted crocodile for the first time in the US. (Between 1982 and 1990, there were 3 pairs of M. cataphractus breeding at Miami.) In 1983, he hatched Siamese crocodiles for the first time on exhibit, and he maintained the hatchlings on exhibit with the adults. In 1984, he successfully bred Tomistoma, the Malayan gharial, with both Zoo Miami (then "Miami MetroZoo") and the Bronx Zoo breeding them that year for the first time in North America.

In 1986, Zoo Miami received the Edward H Bean Award (the AZA’s recognition of a truly significant captive propagation effort that clearly enhances the management of the species) for its crocodilian breeding program. He retired from Zoo Miami in 1996 and moved to Ocala, running a consulting business on exhibit design, zoo collection development, fundraising, master site planning and board development. During that time, he also worked with a number of conservation programs, including one for Indian gharial.

In 2010, Bill was lured out of "retirement" by the Brookfield Zoo! There, he has orchestrated a number of groundbreaking programs on a myriad of issues, and continues to be a leader in his field.

Please join us in congratulating Bill for his long and outstanding history of crocodilian achievements!
About the project:

*Conservation Program for Crocodylus rhombifer in Cuba’s Zapata Swamp*

Proceeds from Summer CrocFest 2017 will be directed to Natalia Rossi, PhD, Cuba Program Manager, Latin American and Caribbean Program with the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS). A portion of her proposal is below.

**Background**

The critically endangered Cuban crocodile (*Crocodylus rhombifer*) has the smallest, most restricted geographic distribution among all living species of the order Crocodylia, and is now found only in parts of Cuba’s Zapata and Lanier swamps. The Zapata swamp is the largest coastal wetland in the insular Caribbean, hosting incredible levels of species endemism and remaining populations of Cuban crocodiles. American crocodiles (*Crocodylus acutus*) also inhabit brackish and coastal areas of the Zapata swamp, hybridizing in the wild with *C. rhombifer*. Historically *C. rhombifer* was found throughout the Zapata Peninsula but indiscriminate hunting for skins in the second half of the 19th century until the early 1960s decimated most *C. rhombifer* populations reducing approximately 30% of the species’ historical range. Today, Cuban crocodiles inhabit a territory of about 77,600 hectares in the Southwestern tip of the Zapata Peninsula, with populations aggregating mainly in a core area of 30,000 hectares, which they share with the American crocodile and the hybrids of both species.

In 1959 Cuba funded a captive breeding facility to aid *C. rhombifer* conservation efforts, bringing *C. rhombifer* and *C. acutus* from the wild as source populations. Currently, the Zapata captive breeding facility houses about 4,000 crocodiles including neonates, juveniles, sub-adults and adults, and constitutes the most important captive reservoir of *C. rhombifer* in the world. Since its creation, the Zapata captive breeding facility has played a key role for the research of Cuban crocodiles.

Dr. Roberto (Toby) Ramos Targarona has led *C. rhombifer* conservation efforts since the early 70s, carrying out seminal research of *C. rhombifer* in captivity and in the wild. In spite of these efforts, however, conservation actions to recover the species have been limited due to logistical and financial challenges. In addition, threats to the species’ survival have intensified: illegal hunting of crocodiles in the Zapata Swamp has become a systematic practice since the 1990s, affecting the species’ distribution and population size (with estimates of 4,000-5,000 *C. rhombifer* left in the wild in 2008). Since the spiking of tourism in Cuba in recent years, illegal hunting of *C. rhombifer* has increased significantly to provide meat to restaurants targeting tourists. In addition, hybridization with American crocodiles, although it has occurred for thousands of years, was revealed to be an additional threat for the loss of *C. rhombifer* genomic identity in the context of its small population size and habitat restrictions in the Peninsula. Since the listing of *C. rhombifer* as critically endangered by the IUCN in 2008, a comprehensive body of research was produced on the genetics of hybridization between *C. rhombifer* and *C. acutus*. Research led by Yoamel Milian Garcia and collaborators (2014) reported estimated rates of hybridization in the wild as high as 49%, and identified 37 genetically “pure” *C. rhombifer* individuals important for management purposes.

**Project Goals and Objectives**

In collaboration with Cuban partners, our goal is to support the development of a comprehensive species recovery strategy for *C. rhombifer* using a three-pronged approach consisting of: 1) supporting reintroduction efforts; 2) taking initial steps to understand and tackle poaching, and 3) raising awareness of the conservation status and challenges to this critically endangered, charismatic species. We will partner with Toby Ramos, the Cuban NGO Fundación Antonio Nuñez Jiménez, Dr. Frank Mazzotti (the Croc Docs) at Fort Lauderdale Research and Education Center, and Zapata National Park management authorities and staff to carry out this project. The primary activities we will undertake to address these three objectives include:

- **Reintroduce captive *C. rhombifer* into the wild.** We will support the reintroduction of genetically pure *C. rhombifer* from the Zapata captive breeding facility into The Wildlife Refuge Channels of Hanabana (WRCH, Refugio de Fauna Canales del Hanabana). The WRCH encompasses 570 hectares of water channels, lagoons,
marsh grasslands, and swamp forests in the easternmost Zapata Peninsula where Cuban crocodiles historically occurred. Marsh grasslands in this Refuge provide crucial habitat for Cuban crocodiles, as well as the abundant bird, fish and mammal species important as food sources for this crocodilian species. Efforts will be made to minimize/prevent hybridization with C. acutus as WRCH is less suitable for C. acutus and no reports of this species have been documented in the area. The WRCH is strategically located to prevent poaching, as (1) no communities live in the Refuge, and (2) a biological station is under construction and permanent presence of Refuge managers and researchers will enhance protection of released crocodiles.

- **Monitor reintroduced C. rhombifer at WRCH.** A research team lead by Toby Ramos will monitor reintroduced individuals to determine how they adjust to their new environment. The team will consider demographic, health and adaptation aspects of released crocodiles to evaluate the success of reintroduction efforts and adjust protocols as necessary. The team will also closely monitor potential threats to C. rhombifer in this area, as well as environmental changes such as changes in water regimes that might affect the reintroduced population.

- **Conduct a series of workshops to better understand the drivers and extent of poaching.** Reynaldo Estrada from Fundación Nuñez Jimenez will lead efforts to assess poaching and design first steps to combat it. Reynaldo has over two decades of experience working with local communities in the Zapata Peninsula, and has dedicated his efforts over the last decade to supporting the conservation of Cuban crocodiles in this region. A Community Engagement Workshop and a Law Enforcement Engagement Workshop will be carried out to involve key actors in the poaching crisis. The Community Engagement Workshop will target local communities in the Zapata Peninsula adjacent to poaching areas. The Law Enforcement Engagement Workshop will target staff of the Zapata National Park, National Office of State Inspection (ONIE), and Forest Inspection Office. These three institutions are tasked with the protection of forest and wildlife, and enforcement of the environmental law.

- **Conduct an education campaign to raise awareness about Cuban crocodiles and the challenges to their conservation.** We will re-initiate an education campaign to raise public awareness about the conservation of C. rhombifer, engaging rural communities of the Zapata Peninsula and the broader audience in Havana. We will use posters, public talks and other tools to reach out to the public. We will include Spanish and English versions of printed materials to target tourists visiting Zapata in addition to locals.

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An auction item that went for top dollar ...

by CLAIR’S Wild Life!

Many thanks to Claire Hickman, Terry Vandeventer and all of the other talented artisans who shared the fruit of their exceptional talents with CrocFest!!
A fantastic CrocFest cake was enjoyed by all, courtesy of Wendy Eddinger

Amazing crew! Crocstar Troy Lilly, Luis Caraballo, Mike Kliebert, Flavio Morrissiey, Nathan Sweeting and Mark Merchant

Please join us on December 9, 2017 at St. Augustine Alligator Farm for Winter CrocFest 2017!!