

* * * * * APRIL 1975 *Whitaker*

THE APPEARANCE OF AN ITEM IN THIS NEWSLETTER DOES NOT CONSTITUTE PUBLICATION

* * * * *

UNITED STATES

The crocodile accounts for the American Catalogue of Amphibians and Reptiles, long neglected, are now being assigned and produced. Group Member Howard Campbell has been appointed Crocodylia Section Editor. The account for Alligator mississippiensis has been assigned to C. Andrew Ross. Crocodylus rhombifer is being done by Luis Varona. Tentative assignments of C. moreletii and Caiman crocodilus are being arranged. Dr. Campbell hopes to have all New World crocodylian accounts assigned by the end of the year.

The United States Department of the Interior has appointed a formal "Recovery Team" to develop a Recovery Plan and recommend for continued management of the alligator. Chairman of the Recovery Team is Ted Joanen. Members are Howard Campbell, Tommy Hines, Ron S. Odom, Mark O. Bara, Bob Chabreck, Jacob Valentine, Jr., and John M. Anderson.

Proposals are currently being made to change the status of Alligator mississippiensis and the American population of Crocodylus acutus on the U. S. Endangered Species List. As these proposals have not yet appeared in the Federal Register, the editor has no further information at the moment. However, it is not difficult to imagine in which direction the proposed changes go. While there might conceivably be legitimate arguments on both sides as regards the alligator, any compromise in complete protection for the Florida population of the crocodile would be a quick death sentence to this species in its intrinsically precarious American range.

CUBA

René Honerger submits the following data on the status of Crocodylus rhombifer in Cuba. The source of his information is Prof. Dr. H. Dathe, Director, Tierpark Berlin-Friedrichsfelds, Berlin, German Democratic Republic (East Germany). With members of his zoo staff, Dr. Dathe visited Cuba in 1962, 1967, 1968, and 1970:

1962--About 650-300 specimens of Crocodylus rhombifer were kept in a farm in the Zapata Swamp. High mortality due to cannibalism and predation by vultures. First breeding occurred.

1967--Population had increased to about 2800 animals, said to be C. rhombifer. Breeding specimens were kept separately. Eggs were collected

and incubated both "by natural means" (no details) and artificially. 1968--Population had increased to about 12,000 animals, said to be C. rhombifer. Small crocodiles kept in special enclosures. Feeding on slaughter-house refuse caused increased activity by vultures. Mortality rate still high.

1970--Population now estimated at 18,000 animals, said to be C. rhombifer. About 4600 juveniles at the farm. About 20 breeding units. A diet of marine fish had been substituted for the diet of slaughter-house refuse, owing to infectious disease problems caused by the latter.

Miscellaneous data:

The export of C. rhombifer is under the sole supervision of Fidel Castro. Larger animals are being culled for the leather industry.

The crocodile farm at the Zapata Swamp is increasingly becoming a tourist attraction.

There were no data on hybridization between rhombifer and acutus.

There is said to be a farm for C. acutus somewhere in Oriente Province. No exact locality given.

Attempts at captive breeding of C. rhombifer in the Havana zoo have not been successful, owing to overcrowding. Plans for a new zoo, projected to cover 200 hectares, are on the drawing board.

Dr. Dathe plans to publish the above information, with illustrations, in a forthcoming issue of Der Zoologische Garten.

AFRICA

The following article is by Dr. John Hukku, Senior Veterinary Officer, Labasa, Vanua Levu, Fiji:

"Where have all the crocodiles gone?"

"One of the most exciting sights in tropical Africa is a mudbank of a great river, when the local crocodile population, great and small, emerges from the water to spend time basking in the mid-afternoon sun. If this scene is then set against a backdrop of Mount Gebel Ayelu, the manifold ethnic, cultural and for me--veterinary attractions of the Danakil region of Gewani, Buri, Ba'adu Lake, Urfage, Kodo'i, Fe'ayt Debel Gufferamo and Weinharra are augmented by the pleasures of unexpected sights of wildlife.

"On our various veterinary safaris into this region from early May 1973 until late February 1974, it was common to see Awash River mudbanks accommodating up to four adult (4 m.) crocodiles. There were always numerous "infectures" around. (60 cm.--2 m.) Danakil coats (and children occasionally) were regularly taken by the crocodiles. The Danakil people

themselves seldom shoot crocodile, though hippopotamus is a favorite target.

"Until mid-November 1973, the crocodile population seemed healthy enough. In addition the same region supported quite large numbers of Bushbuck, two species of Dik-dik, Lesser Kudu, Warthog, Oryx, Soemmering's Gazelles, and lion was common enough also. Further south, I saw Gerenuk, Grevy's Zebra and the Somali Wild Ass on numerous occasions.

"In mid-February 1974, the last occasion on which I led a veterinary expedition to that same Danakil region, Oryx, Warthog and Gazelles were still present, but Hippopotamus and Bushbuck had become extremely shy. We heard lion once only--though it killed a camel the next day. Of crocodile however, there was neither sight nor suspicion. In a fortnight I saw just one baby crocodile of about 45 cms. in length--but nothing bigger along a stretch of some 40 kms. of the Awash River. I cannot believe that this was a result of some normal biological function. The Danakil people reported having seen crocodile only very occasionally. They were, however, noticeably irked by the presence--the ostentatious presence--of high-speed, light trucks with white people aboard; people of whose business in the area they did not approve. Need I elaborate?

"At a time when the importation of crocodile skins was prohibited by many (but not all) western countries, it is interesting to speculate on the likely destination of large numbers of crocodile skins. It is sad that the Wildlife Conservation Organization saw fit to authorize what I call the de-crocodilation of the lower Awash River--if indeed they were a party to such events.

"In a country so richly endowed with four-legged predators, is it too much to expect officialdom to divest itself of its inherent cloak of malpractices, and to attempt to strike a more reasonable balance between game populations and two-legged predators? Evidently it is.

"As traffic on the 1974 Awash-Tendaho Highway increases, it is not difficult to visualize the early eradication and extinction of many of the less common species of game in the lower Awash region. Is it just wishful thinking--by a veterinarian--that the maintenance of tsetse-fly in Wollega and Illubabor Provinces represents the only faint hope of survival for the game populations of these regions?"

Also dealing with Ethiopia, the following excerpts are from "1973--A Wildlife Report", by F. W. Duckworth; Walia (No. 5) August, 1974. Walia is the journal of the Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society.

"The Akebo River

"Over a hundred Nuer crocodile hunters were encountered fording the Shilo River. They said that they were hunting the crocodile in pools and caves. The skins from the crocodile would eventually be sold to someone at Jakoa who shipped them to Khartoum. Two days later some of these same men were seen at Ciam. They had fresh skins. At a water-hole, others were met who had dug three crocodiles out of their caves and having skinned them, left their carcasses to pollute the water."

"The Baro River--Crocodile

"These unfortunate reptiles are being hunted mercilessly for their skins by large parties of Nuer hunters. They have been completely cleaned out from large sections of the Alurero River."

MALAYSIA

The following excerpt is from International Zoo News (Vol. 21-2, No. 119) 21 March 1974:

"Reptiles Malaysia

"The Company was formed and registered in Kuala Lumpur in November 1973. The promoters are the writer and two local businessmen and conservationists.

"The primary objects of the Company are the conservation, breeding, rearing and farming of certain species of crocodiles. The aim to provide quantities of young animals for release into protected habitats is embodied in the Company Memorandum of Association.

"All capital funding is coming from the promoters who are to run the venture on commercial lines to achieve self-sufficiency. As non-commercial long term aims such as the breeding of endangered species will require financial support, a small Zoological Garden specialising in reptiles and local fauna is being built in this rapidly growing tourist resort.

"Gate receipt income will be used to purchase land for the second phase. A minimum of 70 acres in a country area will be sought to contain the main breeding pens. Special requirements are (1) a plentiful fresh water source which (2) is not likely to be contaminated for several decades with (3) proximity to adequate food source and (4) reasonable road access.

"Apart from the rising trend in land prices the need for this additional land is not considered an early priority as it is the present intention to start with groups of immature animals which will only later

require extensive conditions for breeding. Adult animals cannot be collected and confined without high losses through trauma and fighting, that is, assuming adults can be located and caught. (It is known that groups raised together require less space than a normal wild population density).

"No attempt will be made to obtain all species. Special attention will be given to (Toniator schlegeli) and (Gavialis gangeticus) and several groups of each, if obtainable, will be the aim. (Crocodylus porosus) and (Alligator mississippiensis) will be kept in quantity for growth rate and breeding studies.

"Ultimately successful breeding will produce large numbers of offspring for release or distribution. Surplus animals with acceptable skin characteristics will be culled and the revenue from hides will be used to support the operations.

"Close liaison with local universities is being developed and cooperation with other interested parties will be welcomed.

"The formation and establishment of the project is not going to be without problems, but if its full potential is realised breeding gene pools of endangered species will have been created and the confidence of the promoters will not have been misplaced.

"I would be very pleased to hear from interested people. Please write to me at Reptiles Malaysia, 24 Northam Road, Penang, Malaysia."

--Ken Sims.

Rene Honninger, who submitted the above item, adds that the Zürich Zoo has sent two Osteolemus tetraspis to Mr. Sims for inclusion in his project.

AUSTRALIA

Wayne King submits the following item:

"The government of Queensland, Australia, passed its wildlife conservation ordinances in August, 1974. Since then they have placed both species of Australian crocodiles on the protected list in that state. This closes the last area where crocodiles could be hunted legally in all of Australia, and thereby closes the loophole which has permitted specimens killed in the northern territories to be smuggled to Queensland for sale."

* * * *

James Powell, editor
--Plainview, Texas, U. S. A.
21 April 1975