

Crocodile Specialist Group Steering Committee Meeting

(Santa Fe, Argentina; 11-12 May 1996)

Participants—Members: Deputy Chair, F. Wayne King, Exec. Officer, J.P. Ross, A. Larriera, A. Velasco, L. Aquino, M. Rodriguez, J. Hutton, O. Behra, G. Webb, R. Jenkins, P. Ratanakorn, P. Stobbs, Y. Takehara, D. Ashley, V. Lance, J. Thorbjarnarson, D. David, O. Menghi. Observers: T. Dacey (Australia), S. Frutos, R. Palacio (Paraguay), A. Matsuda (Japan), A.Q. Alba (Spain), C.H. Giam (Singapore), G. Solmu (PNG), H. Zambrano, M. Stambulie, S. Medrano, A. Leivano (Colombia), C. Pina, C. von Fink, P. Donayo, P. Amaret, P. Siroski, A. Imhof (Argentina), G. Hernandez, A. Artega (Venezuela), L. Sigler, B. Figueroa, M. Munez, (Mexico), R. Godshalk, W. Woodward, S. Pandya, P. Wilkinson (USA), U. Youngprapakorn, W. Leelpatra, Chomjet Karnjanakesorn (Thailand), A. Paucar, P. Evans (Ecuador) L. Verdade (Brazil), F. Huchzermayer (Sth. Africa).

[Editors note. The minutes are a record of discussions and decisions of the steering committee as recorded and approved at the meeting. Subsequent events and actions may not be reflected in this record.]

The meeting opened at 10.30 am Saturday, 11 May 1996, and received the apologies of the Chairman, Prof. Harry Messel and his instructions to proceed under the chairmanship of the Deputy Chairman F. Wayne King. Appropriate congratulations were offered to Alejandro Larriera's birthday and Alvaro Velasco's six day old daughter.

CSG Reports.

Membership. The executive officer outlined the process for membership renewal at the end of the present triennium in late 1996. As before, vice chairmen will be asked to nominate members for renewal or addition to the group for the Chairman's approval. A request was made for a full CSG membership list for distribution and this was provided to all meeting participants as part of the 13th Working Meeting registration materials.

Finance. The Executive Officer presented financial summaries for the current year and a draft budget. Expenditures for 1996 are anticipated to be \$62,500 and expenditures to date \$32,636.77. A short discussion of fundraising needs followed. A new fee of 2.5% of all incoming donations to the CSG account at the University of Florida was explained, and accepted as an unavoidable operating expense for which valuable financial, accounting and auditing services were received.

13th Meeting. Alejandro Larriera reported on arrangements for the 13th Working Meeting. About 150 participants were anticipated. Simultaneous translation would be available and the meeting appeared to be financially solvent as long as a promised donation from the Governor of Santa Fe was received. A letter from Professor Messel thanking Alejandro and the organizers was read.

Correction. The Executive Officer informed the Steering Committee that the Opinion article in the current NEWSLETTER 15(1):2-3 was wrongly attributed to Bill Magnusson and in fact was written and submitted by John Thorbjarnarson. This erroneous attribution was an editorial error and P. Ross apologized to John Thorbjarnarson for this unfortunate mistake. A full correction and explanation will appear in the next NEWSLETTER [see page 2. *Eds.*]. The content of the article was praised by several members and a request made to put the article on the agenda for discussion.

DNA Workshop. Val Lance reported on the very successful workshop on applications of DNA studies to crocodylians recently held in Colombia, South Carolina, USA. Discussion followed on the complexities of international transfer of DNA and other genetic material, involving sensitive issues of national rights to resource value, biodiversity issues, and CITES and national regulations. There is a need for a clear CSG policy that reflected current international concerns. Jon Hutton introduced information on the up-coming CITES evaluation process and proposed that CSG prepare materials on this and other topics and channel them through parties to the CITES Review.

IUCN Red List. P. Ross reported on the recent unsatisfactory response of CSG to the IUCN request to apply the new IUCN listing criteria and evaluate crocodylian status for the IUCN Red Data Book. A request for input from members in the NEWSLETTER had not resulted in any response. Discussion followed on the value and effects of this process. The need for an effective mechanisms to channel available CSG expertise to respond to such requests was acknowledged. The ongoing review of the 1995 revision of the Action Plan was recommended as an available vehicle for summarizing information. Regional vice chairmen were urged to coordinate responses from their regions. A workshop was designed for the 13th Meeting to introduce the new criteria and begin the evaluation process. Jon Hutton proposed that funding for conservation was distorted by the CITES process which channeled funds toward quite common species (e.g. *Caiman crocodylus*) because they were in trade, while very rare species which much greater conservation needs were ignored. He proposed adding this consideration to a CSG input to the CITES Review. A working group of Hutton, P. Ross, John Thorbjarnarson, Hank Jenkins and Obdulio Menghi were asked to draft the necessary document.

New Publications. Wayne King gave a brief report on the new CSG material available on the World Wide Web. Continued use of this valuable communication mechanism was recommended. However, as the majority of CSG members do not yet have access to the web, continued use of traditional materials would be necessary. Wayne King reported on the recent production of a new CITES Identification Guide and key to crocodiles for customs agents and management authorities prepared by Richard Charrette of Environment Canada, with input and assistance from several CSG members.

Steering Committee. Proposals for changes in the Steering Committee membership were outlined and the subject deferred to allow the committee time to discuss these. Members were asked to review the whole structure of the Steering Committee and make recommendations that could be discussed and passed on to the Chairman (see below).

CITES and Trade issues.

Tanzania. The historic background to the current Tanzanian quota of 1,000 wild caught Nile crocodiles was presented. A letter from Mr. John Kundaali, CITES officer for the African region, informed us that Tanzania exported 177 skins in 1994, 584 skins in 1995 and 100 skins up to March 1996. These exports were well within the allowed quota although information on the number of crocodiles taken and their origins and control mechanisms that were minuted in the CITES 9th Meeting of the Parties have not been received. Regrettably, a delegate from Tanzania invited to the CSG meeting did not attend and no further information was available. Tanzania has expressed an intention to submit a request to CITES to either extend the quota or move its Nile crocodile population to Appendix II following the new CITES criteria (Res. Conf 9.20) and a consultant was being retained to prepare this proposal. The Tanzanian Management Authority has recently been reorganized following a change of government in Tanzania. The Steering Committee proposed that a letter be sent to the new Director of the Management Authority, requesting information on the program, and that Dietrich Jelden be asked to follow up during his CITES activities in Tanzania.

Madagascar. The African representative reported that there was little change in the situation in Madagascar. The farming program continues to have organizational difficulties, but remains the only positive incentive for crocodile conservation, although it is applied to only a limited region. A review of farm stocks recommended at the last CITES meeting had not been completed because of financial difficulties. Reports were received of crocodile products of Madagascar origin being very common on Mauritius indicating that substantial illegal commerce continues. After discussion the Steering Committee concluded that imposition of a zero export quota, or even return of the Madagascar population to Appendix I might be an inevitable and unavoidable result of the failure of the Madagascar program to make progress. No action on this possibility was proposed, however, the meeting felt that the issue of illegal trade to Mauritius was properly the concern of the CITES Animals Committee under the operation of Conf. Res 8.9 Significant Trade in Appendix II species. It was therefore agreed that a letter would be sent to the Madagascar Management Authority expressing the CSG concerns about this issue with cc: to CITES Secretariat and to the African representatives of the Animals Committee. A second letter should be sent directly to the Animals Committee representatives requesting that the matter be brought into the Conf. Res 8.9 process.

USA Regulations on *C. niloticus* and *C. porosus*. The long awaited new US regulations on imports of these species have been completed and were signed recently. This process has taken 13 years! for species that are not endangered and are on Appendix II of CITES. No surprise was expressed when we were informed there will be another "small delay" to effect a new US Congress requirement for all new regulations to receive an analysis of its economic impact. Information has been provided directly to the US Fish and Wildlife Service to assist this analysis, but extreme skepticism remained that the regulations will be made public or come into effect soon. [We were wrong, see update pages 21-22. Eds.]

The content of the new regulations remains unknown in detail but are said to represent a middle of the road position between the CITES minimal requirements and the very draconian draft that was circulated and widely criticized in 1994. The similar new regulations regarding *Caiman yacare* remain deliberately stalled within the Service awaiting finalization of the *niloticus/porosus* regulations, which will be the model for additional crocodilian import regulations for the USA.

Discussion followed on the great frustration this process has provoked among range states of these non-endangered species. The repeated misinformation released by the Service on the process and timing of the regulations were presented. Numerous statements quoted by senior Service officials on the impending completion of the process within weeks or months, dating back to 1978, were read to the meeting. The long term consequences of this recurring difficulty may be to provoke quite extreme modifications to the US Endangered Species Act. It is evident that neither CSG intervention, action through CITES or direct lobbying by range states has been able to affect this process, and that it may take an approach through some wider forum such as the World Trade Organization through the GATT treaty to resolve the matter. Action by CSG would be redundant and ineffective at this time. Representatives of range states were urged to meet and coordinate their efforts.

Northern Territory Management Plan. The Northern Territory has submitted a new management plan for crocodilians following the downlisting of the Australian population of *C. porosus* to Appendix II. The program continues the ranching and nuisance control activities of the past and proposes selective direct cropping of particularly dangerous animals on a sustainable basis. The Group agreed that this program continued the exemplary progress of crocodile management in Northern Territory on a sustainable basis that was of direct conservation benefit to the species and recommended that a letter commending the plan be sent.

Papua New Guinea Crocodile Program Review. Results of reviews on crocodile monitoring and management in PNG conducted by Charlie Manolis were summarized. Godfrid Solmu, representing the PNG crocodile management unit, outlined his department's plans for implementing the recommendations from the review and Paul Stobbs of Mainland Holdings reiterated the commitment of the private sector to maintaining the management program. An independent review of the economic structure of the program and implications for sustainability, conducted by World Conservation Monitoring Center was presented. All these reviews conclude that the PNG crocodile program continues to demonstrate apparent sustainability and that crocodile populations are not declining under the present use regime. Recommendations to improve monitoring and maintain sustainability of the program are being implemented by the PNG government.

Zimbabwe crocodile program review. A very extensive draft review report prepared by Dr. John Loveridge was presented. CSG has been asked to assist the new Zimbabwe Wildlife Department and the Crocodile Farmers Association evaluate the review and implement the recommendations of the report. To achieve this the review document was

passed to CSG members Allan Woodward, Alvaro Velasco and Grahame Webb for detailed analysis and comment. Each of these reviewers is intimately associated with running crocodylian management programs and were thought to be very appropriate experts. Their comments will be combined and passed back to the Zimbabwe authority. In addition the meeting recommended letters to Dr. Loveridge, congratulating him on his effort, to the IUCN regional office offering assistance in evaluating the review, and the CFAZ requesting that they assist the evaluation and implementation process with funding.

General discussion followed on reviewing crocodylian management programs. It was noted that the PNG and Zimbabwe reviews were an implementation of CSG policy articulated in Thailand to conduct reviews of established projects. Additionally reviews were being conducted internally by Venezuela (see below) and by CITES in Colombia. The need for CSG criteria or guidelines to focus reviews on appropriate topics received broad discussion. The value of drawing attention to important features was recognized, but the danger of unnecessarily restricting reviews was strongly supported. The consensus of the meeting was that criteria that might be strictly used to qualify or disqualify programs from approval were not useful as they were liable to excessively literal application in a way that could not take into consideration the great differences between countries and programs. The failure of the IUCN Sustainable Use Specialist Group to develop criteria for sustainability, and their subsequent withdrawal from the whole idea of criteria was presented as a case in point. It was generally agreed that a list of "Elements to examine" or "Points to consider" in evaluating programs was valuable as a guide to program managers as to what the CSG's expectations are. Such a guide would be valuable for both the retroactive evaluation of existing programs and as a general guide for evaluation of proposals for new management programs in both CITES and Non-CITES applications. The draft list of such points developed at the Pattaya meeting proved useful in Zimbabwe but needs modification. The meeting finally proposed that the Pattaya draft list be further refined and modified to be presented back to the Group at a future meeting. A draft prepared by John Thorbjarnarson after the meeting is presented below.

Colombia report. Miguel Rodriguez informed the Group about recent developments in Colombia. Colombia has recently signed the Amazon Cooperative Treaty (involving Brazil, Bolivia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Surinam, Guyana) and is an active member of the Commission for the environment of that treaty. Within this commission, Colombia is taking the lead in coordinating a regional plan for the conservation and sustainable use of *Melanosuchus niger*. French Guiana is not a member of the treaty but attends as an observer as it has important *M. niger* populations. Colombia requested technical advice and support from CSG and announced a workshop in November 1996 to initiate discussion of a regional management plan. CITES was supporting the workshop. Additional detailed information concerning recent developments in crocodylian farming in Colombia, technical developments and a series of field surveys to assess wild populations of various species, were being presented to the 13th Working Meeting, demonstrating significant advances in field studies in Colombia. The Group recommended letters to Colombia commending these excellent developments and to the

Inter-American Bank for funding the workshop. Colombian representatives were also invited to submit an article for the CSG NEWSLETTER on these activities.

Exotic Species transfers. Reports were received on a number of recent or current instances of transfer of crocodiles into the range of other species for commercial use. These were the completed transfer of 100 *C. niloticus* from South Africa to China, a renewed request for permits for several thousand caiman from Venezuela to Thailand, inquiries made in PNG to buy failing crocodile farms and transfer their live stock to China, the long established introduction of *C. moreletii* into the Pacific drainage of Mexico, and the continuing unresolved issue of Nile crocodiles exported to Brazil in 1990, which are now producing offspring and the skins are being exported. Clarification and additional information was received on several of these. A representative of Samutprakan farm in Thailand confirmed that they already had many caiman and were trying to obtain more to use them in place of Siamese crocodiles in their tourist facility where they are used to make 'crocodile' soup for tourists. A. Velasco informed the Group that Venezuela was unable to prohibit the exports to Thailand as it would be inconsistent with the current export of 5,000 live caiman annually to the USA for the pet trade. The South African - China transfer occurred despite the explicit advice of the CSG not to recommend it, which was communicated directly to both Management Authorities concerned. In PNG, exports may be approved by the government because of both the political and commercial pressures involved.

It is self evident that such transfers are common and that the CSG lacks the authority to prevent them. The background to the development of the CSG policy against exotic transfers was reviewed, and the fundamental reasons for that policy remain valid, i.e. potential negative ecological effects when exotics escape, and erosion of effectiveness of conservation programs for native species. Nevertheless, this issue appears to have got away from us. After extensive discussion it was agreed that the CSG should maintain its policy as our principled stand on the issue continues to provide some support for Management Authorities attempting to oppose exotic transfers. At the same time it would be useful to draw the issue to the attention of a wider body of conservation interests. Exotic transfers of crocodilians could be considered by the Invasive Species Specialist Group of SSC and raises the question of whether ex-situ captive breeding activities have any conservation value, or whether they destabilize existing conservation programs in range states. As in previous discussions, the apparent value of some captive breeding activities for very rare species makes the issue complex. After extensive debate the Group reiterated its basic policy, that the CSG will not recommend the transfer of crocodile species into the range of other species for commercial purposes, and asked a working group to draft a preliminary policy statement on the problem of ex-situ captive breeding for deeper consideration of the Group at a later meeting. As this issue had been raised by John Thorbjarnarson in his NEWSLETTER article he agreed to lead that group. The draft output is presented below.

The meeting adjourned at 6.20 pm and reconvened at 9.33 am, Sunday, 12 May.