

Crocodile Specialist Group Steering Committee Meeting

(Fort Lauderdale, FL, USA; 7 November 1994)

Present: H. Messel, F. W. King, D. Jelden, P. Ross, H. Jenkins, G. Webb, A. Larriera, I. L. Brisbin, D. David, T. Joanen, R. Elsey, O. Behra, A. Villa-Lopera, P. Ratanakorn, S. Broad, C. H. Koh, J. Villalba Macias.

Observers: Y. Takehara, N. Ishii, A. Saikyo, E. Carrillo, A. Sugiyama, K. Preiss, L. Roiter, U. Youngprapakorn, W. Leelapatra, W. Ramono, G. Letts, S. Ranot, E. Fernandez, J. White, E. Velasco, P. Evans, P. Viallejo, A. Paucar, N. Kinler, D. Ashley, A. Woodward, T. Hines, P. Wilkinson, K. Rice, D. Carbonneau, A. Taito, Y. Kobuchi, M. Kobuchi, K. Ogiso, S. Broad, F. Miadana Harisoa, J. Rahaja Harison, E-J. Rakotonanana, C. Carson, S. Tunhikorn, T. Waller, C. Vitale, E. Severre, R. Charette, R. Wiradinata, G. Saputra.

The CSG Steering Committee meeting at Fort Lauderdale was well attended with seventeen Steering Committee members and 41 members and observers from over 20 countries. After opening the meeting and thanking all present for their efforts, the chairman, Professor Messel, proposed that forty five minutes be used for routine CSG business and then the meeting would adjourn until 1 pm to allow members with commitments to CITES events to be absent.

CSG business, finances. A cumulative financial report for the first three quarters of 1994 and an interim report showing current balances was presented by the Executive Officer. Donations of \$44,655.46 and other revenues of \$30,210.05 were received and expenses to date totaled \$61,601.62 leaving a current balance of \$36,549.51. Of this current balance \$17,005.00 was committed to special projects leaving an \$19,544.50 available for general operations. All major expenses anticipated for the year had already been met so that a year end balance of just under \$20,000 was anticipated. While this cash situation was unusually favorable, CSG usually experiences extreme cash flow shortages in the new year until major donations are received. Careful fund management was creating an operating surplus to help buffer such shortages in 1995.

Newsletter subscriptions. Response to the request for subscriptions was received from 123 people. Of these, 55 (45%) were unable to make a donation and the remainder sent in \$2,320 in subscriptions and \$1,795 in additional donations for a total of \$4,115.00 toward Newsletter production. Brief discussion of whether a lower suggested subscription would increase responses and net revenue was held with a majority feeling the current suggested donation of \$40.00 should be maintained.

Membership renewal. Following the mandate from IUCN to renew membership every three years, 345 individuals nominated by regional Vice Chairmen were sent an invitation to be CSG members for the next triennium 1994 - 1996. Early returns indicate 65 acceptances, 2 inactive addresses and one declination. Nominated members have been asked to return the three page response sheet to IUCN and to send a copy of the first page with their current address to CSG in Gainesville, USA. A stabilized membership of around 340 is anticipated and additional members may be invited through the triennium.



Photo: Steering Committee of the CSG in session, Fort Lauderdale, USA. T. Kataoka photo.

13th Working meeting of the CSG. Following the receipt in Pattaya of tentative invitations to host the next CSG meeting, a questionnaire was sent to potential hosts asking for details of the facilities and services they could offer. Responses were received from Singapore, Argentina and Cuba. Representatives of each of these made brief presentations concerning their invitation. Discussion followed on the relative merits of each possibility and the desirability of alternating CSG meetings between regions and keeping costs low. Considerable support for the detailed invitation from Argentina was expressed and the chairman's proposal to accept this invitation was unopposed. The chairman thanked the other offers and proposed that Singapore be given priority consideration for the following (14th) Working Meeting should they choose to offer an invitation again. The 13th Working Meeting of the CSG will therefore be held in Santa Fe, Argentina, in May 1996, hosted by Proyecto Yacare and Convenio/Inta/Magic/MUPCN coordinated by Alejandro Larriera. The Executive Officer was instructed to coordinate with the hosts and inform the membership at the earliest possibility of the various arrangements.

Thailand. Mr. Wattana Leelapatra, of Department of Fisheries, presented a response from the Thai Authorities to the review of crocodile management in Thailand that took place in May 1994. In a report to the CSG Review Committee responding to the recommendations of the Review, Mr. Wattana noted that the necessary regulations have now been approved as a Ministerial Notification and are now in place. Additional actions and plans to address the remaining recommendations of the review were presented including a draft management plan for crocodiles in Thailand. CSG was requested to review and comment upon the draft Management Plan. The persistent problem of bringing caiman imports under regulation was discussed and the Thai authorities have proposed action in this regard in conjunction with major importers. Dr. P. Ratanakorn reported that the issue of imports of crocodiles from Cambodia was now clearly recognized in Thailand and that the issue would be addressed in bilateral discussions with Cambodia in January 1995. The chairman congratulated Thailand on their prompt and vigorous response to the review and hoped that progress in crocodile management and trade control would be maintained.

CITES Identification Manual. Mr. Richard Charette of Environment Canada was introduced and outlined the work he was undertaking for the CITES Secretariat to produce new ID manuals for crocodilians suitable for use by customs officials. He explained the approach he had taken with an ID manual for birds and invited assistance and comments from CSG. In response it was agreed that the Executive Officer should maintain contact with Mr. Charette and coordinate his contact with suitable CSG experts on identification.

The meeting then adjourned and re convened at 1.00 pm.

CITES proposals. A statement drafted by CSG and adopted by IUCN as its recommendations on crocodylian proposals was presented. This document reflected CSG decisions made in Pattaya and immediately following and stated that final recommendations would be presented to the CITES meeting. Each proposal was then reviewed and a recommendation finalized.

South Africa. A response by David Blake, to the CSG enquiry of May 1994 regarding surveys clarified the depth of surveys. The question on sport hunting under Conf. 8.22 has been addressed in the modified proposal section 32, para 5 and section 77.

Recommendation: Support.

Australia. The unqualified support for this proposal was reiterated.

Ecuador. In response to the CSG request for clarification of implementation procedures for black caiman management the following information was received:

- The Management Authority, INEFAN, has clarified its policy and assigned a fulltime staff person to crocodylian management.
- A draft management plan outlining licensing and permitting procedures, ranch inspection, technical development and control measures has been prepared.
- An additional survey of the Rio Curaray revealed additional areas where black caiman appear relatively dense.
- Copies of legislation and regulations from Venezuela, Colombia and USA have been provided by CSG to the Management Authority as a guide to develop similar regulations appropriate to Ecuador.
- The cautious approach, extensive data and documentation and very small harvest of eggs (1,500 annually for 3 years) was emphasized.

Despite these advances some apprehension remains about the value of downlisting black caiman prior to the full development of the ranching and management program. After discussion it was proposed that the Ecuadoran Management Authority should propose a zero export quota under 3.15 listing for the next two years and request a CSG review team to evaluate management and recommend to CITES Secretariat when the export quota could be increased. Costs of review would be borne by Ecuador following the procedure established in other CSG reviews. This mechanism is feasible under Conf. Res 3.15. This mechanism was thought to provide adequate safeguards and at the same time encourage the development of management procedures. In this developmental period additional surveys and studies of black caiman biology were encouraged.

Recommendation: Support with conditions as set forth above.

Tanzania. The report by Dietrich Jelden of his inspection in late September was presented and discussed. Jelden recommended extensive revision of the ranching program to enhance its operation and a quota (200-300 annually) for nuisance crocodile control. The Tanzanian representative presented a newly modified proposal that requested a wild harvest quota of 2,000 annually and presented updated and improved data on human mortality due to crocodiles. The political and human issues of this problem in Tanzania were recognized. Following prolonged discussion it was agreed that actual number of large crocodiles removed from the wild to protect human life was not a critical issue and that a wild harvest of between 200 and 2,000 annually might be required. The higher figure seems inconsistent with recent nuisance crocodile control of fewer than 200 per year. A more important issue was identified as the control measures necessary to ensure that animals collected for this quota were actually taken from areas of human crocodile interaction and not taken from protected areas such as the Selous Game Reserve. After discussion and examination of the

government-approved management policy for crocodiles, it was agreed that the necessary mechanisms were available through existing government agency and hunting controls. It was recommended that these measures be explicitly stated in the proposal document and that a component of documentation, reporting and verification of the effectiveness of the program in reducing threats to humans be added. Concern was expressed that the revised wild quota requested of 2,000 annually would be perceived as too high. Following additional discussions with the Tanzanian Management Authority it was determined that the available information appears inadequate to support a wild harvest of the size requested following the requirements of either 3.15 or 8.22. The CSG must therefore take the conservative approach of concurring with the Jelden report recommendations of a wild quota of 300 annually.

Recommendation: Support, contingent upon amendments to the proposal as outlined above and a quota of 300 and an additional quota for sport hunting of 100 annually.

Indonesia. In response to CSG and other concerns Indonesia recently (22 Oct 1994) made an official commitment to impose a voluntary moratorium on all crocodile exports (except personal possessions) pending development of the crocodile management plan. At such time as Indonesia established the management plan and implemented it, and a CSG review committee could recommend to the CITES Secretariat that the plan was implemented, then an export quota would be established. Indonesia proposed to proceed with the 3.15 downlisting request with special conditions under Conf. Res 8.22 for Irian Jaya to parallel the PNG management program. The necessary Decree establishing crocodile management regulations was signed by the Minister in October. Recognizing these substantial developments, and noting that the Standing Committee of CITES had also recognized progress made in crocodile management, the CSG recommends supporting this structure.

Recommendation: Support as described above.

Madagascar. Information was received from the Malagasy Management Authority clarifying the nature of crocodile management and problems with country wide application due to social factors. The growing success of the egg collection/ranching program in the Bessalampy region was described. With the incentive of economic returns over 5 years of the program, local people are now protecting wild crocodiles in this restricted area. Appendix I listing would end this small successful program. The Group agreed that the Madagascar proposal clearly does not qualify for approval as a 3.15 downlisting. Numerous components of monitoring, management, status of the wild population, and trade control are absent. In an attempt to preserve the conservation gains achieved, changing the proposal to a special 7.14 (quota) proposal was suggested. This will require a special extension for 2 years by the Parties. The proposed quota under 7.14 should be restricted to ranched animals from current stock and a figure in the region of 2,000 - 5,000 annually is appropriate. A working group was asked to analyze the available data and propose a suitable quota figure for adoption by the Madagascar authorities.

Recommendation: Reject 3.15 listing, Support 7.14 with a quota for ranched animals only.

These recommendations were circulated to IUCN, the CITES Secretariat and selected Parties. Additional modifications were made to some proposals in the course of negotiations at CITES and the final outcomes are described in a separate report.

India crocodile conservation crisis. Copies of correspondence and newspaper articles on crocodile conservation in India forwarded by Harry Andrews and Rom Whitaker were discussed. The Ministry of Environment has called on all State Forest Wildlife Departments and crocodile breeding facilities to stop breeding crocodiles and repeated their determination not to allow commercial

crocodile ranching or farming in India. Although many state forest departments are favorable to ranching or farming the central government is preventing this and the fate of the thousands of captive crocodiles in India is in doubt. Monitoring of wild populations has been terminated. After discussion the Executive Officer was asked to arrange a meeting with Indian authorities at CITES to discuss the issue. During the following two weeks preliminary enquiries were made but it became evident from the public and private comments of the Indian delegation leader and other members of the delegation that no change in their position could be anticipated at this time. The problem remains deeply rooted in political and cultural realities in India that are obscure to CSG. The considerable gains of crocodile conservation in India are in danger of being reversed and the problem appears intractable.

In other news, Harry Andrews reports that 3 adult pairs of *C. palustris* are being provided from Madras Crocodile Bank for breeding programs and restocking in Bangladesh and Tamil Nadu State Forest Department will provide 300 muggers to Pakistan for restocking there.

Argentina. A summary of progress to date in the *C. latirostris* program in Santa Fe province was presented for discussion. Alejandro Larriera summarized the report and suggested that a proposal for downlisting *C. latirostris* populations in Argentina under 3.15 ranching could be anticipated at the next Conference of the parties.

Yacare imports to the USA. Carmen Vitale of CITES-Paraguay, representing Lucy Aquino, presented a draft statement on the ongoing problems generated by the failure of USA to down list *Caiman crocodilus yacare* under its domestic legislation to become compatible with the CITES Appendix II listing. After discussion the chairman proposed that while CSG supported their efforts, the solution to this problem lay between US and South American representatives.

In subsequent action a meeting was convened by CSG on 15 November to promote informal discussion of the problem between representatives of producer and consumer countries of yacare. Following this meeting a detailed statement was prepared by representatives of Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay and Uruguay, and presented to Mrs. Mollie Beatie, Director of the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The substance of this statement officially calls on the US to take some action with regard to downlisting *yacare*.

Assessment of crocodylian management programs. Following the discussion of this issue at Pattaya a draft set of criteria for carrying out such assessment was presented. The preparers of the draft then withdrew the document as preliminary and unfinished and no further discussion was held. Subsequent to the Steering Committee meeting a revised set of criteria were forwarded by Jon Hutton for consideration by the chairman and the Steering Committee as follows:

DRAFT GUIDELINES FOR CSG REVIEWS OF MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS.

The following are suggested as guidelines for the review of crocodylian management programs that have been ongoing for some time:

- Is the country aware of and fulfilling its obligations under CITES, particularly with respect to tagging and annual reporting?
- Is there a current management plan which is adequate to ensure a high probability that harvesting will be sustainable?
- Is there an adequate legal framework for the implementation of the management plan and the fulfillment of international obligations?
- Is there a monitoring system adequate to detect trends in meaningful population indices and what are these indices and trends?

- Is the management regime non-detrimental or does it give benefits to the wild crocodilian population, and if so, how and to what extent?
- Is there any evidence of illegal trade, and if so, to what extent?
- Are any animal husbandry elements of the management program unduly wasteful and does the management program adequately take into account animal welfare issues in harvesting and husbandry?

Other points of interest are:

- Does the management program give benefits to rural communities and if so how and to what extent?
- Does the management regime give a positive economic return?

DNA studies. Prof. I. Lehr Brisbin introduced some recent advances and results on the use of DNA probes as a tool for crocodilian stock identification with considerable potential for CSG use. He noted that the technique has become user friendly and inexpensive and some preliminary results on *Alligator* suggested that specific DNA markers allowed differentiation of Florida, Louisiana and South Carolina gators. The potential for forensic application was obvious, for example in determining the source of skins collected in the Tanzania nuisance control program. He suggested that CSG needed to take a proactive stance to direct these efforts and proposed a meeting of croc DNA experts to bring scientists together in fall of 1995 and present detailed results to the CSG Working Meeting in Argentina in 1996. Receiving approval in principle he agreed to work with the Executive Officer to coordinate this plan.

Honduras crocodilian management. Eric Fernandez made a presentation on recent developments in the Management Authority of Honduras to strengthen CITES implementation and crocodile management. Effective regulation and conservation of natural wildlife resources in Honduras has taken great steps forward with the development of the rules for protective regulation of wildlife, the creation of a Scientific Authority incorporating academic inputs and the strengthening of the Management Authorities role in CITES implementation. Dr. Polo Micheletti was in charge of CITES implementation directly under the Minister of Natural Resources and with the cooperation of CODEFOR for technical and scientific issues. The proposal to register the farm at San Pedro Sula as a captive breeding facility under Conf. Res 8.15 was submitted to CITES Secretariat and Honduras was informed that the proposal is being circulated to CITES Parties. It was hoped that the recent developments would reassure CSG and Parties that the Management Authority was now fulfilling its obligations. Mr. Fernandez was invited to submit written comments for the minutes on this issue.

World trade in crocodilian skins 1990-1991. Don Ashley presented copies of the new compilation of trade statistics prepared by Richard Luxmoore and Lorraine Collins of World Conservation Monitoring Center under a contract from the International Alligator and Crocodile Trade Study (IAACTS). The report updates previous reports covering 1980 -1987 using CITES trade data from 1988-1991. Imports and exports of whole skins and sides (flanks) are listed by species and country and volume of national and world trade estimated.

The meeting closed at 6.15 pm.
