

## **Crocodile Specialist Group Steering Committee Meeting**

(Regional discussion, Santa Fe, Argentina; 19 May 1995)

Present: F. W. King, A. Larriera, A. Velasco, J. Thorbjarnarson, S. Trachter, O. Menghi, H. Zambrano (delegate for A. Villa), J. P. Ross. CSG Members: L. Verdade, A. M. Trelancia, B. Shwedick, A. Imhof, T. Waller, P. Micucci. Observers: V. Lichtschein (CITES, Argentina), M. Queiroz, M. Morales, C. Morales, C. Pina, T. Hakansson, D. Arias, N. Feludero, V. Rodriguez.

The Fifth Regional Meeting on *Caiman latirostris* and Regional meeting of the CSG brought several CSG Steering Committee members together and the CSG Chairman approved the opportunity to hold a discussion on regional issues. The meeting convened at 4.30 pm 19 May under the chairmanship of the Regional Deputy Vice Chairman, A. Larriera.

**NEXT WORKING MEETING OF THE CSG.** The dates for the next meeting are proposed for 13 -17 May 1996. Alejandro reported on progress to date identifying sponsors and initiating government and NGO assistance. The Fundacion Habitat (an Argentine NGO) has joined Alejandro's organization (INTA/MAGIC/MUPCN) as a host organization and preliminary identification of suitable facilities undertaken. A proposal is in preparation for presentation to the Argentine Government for official approval and assistance for the meeting. Obdulio Menghi noted the great importance of the meeting regionally and proposed that information be made available for distribution through the new CITES Magazine, and directly from the CITES Secretariat to Management Authorities in Latin America. In response to a question about the availability of financial assistance to participants it was noted that while the host organizations have offered to provide accommodations to a selected group of participants, it was not thought appropriate that representatives of Management Authorities should be subsidized by CSG. The long standing policy of CSG not to provide financial assistance for participant travel was noted. It was agreed that Alejandro would coordinate with the Executive officer to develop detailed plans for the meeting and this was done. A call for preliminary registrations and papers will go out with the current Newsletter (July 1995).

**TRANSFER OF EXOTIC SPECIES OF CROCODILIAN.** The Executive Officer summarized events concerning three recent situations regarding transfers of exotic species. These were enquiries from Thai sources attempting to obtain *A. mississippiensis* and *C. crocodilus* to start captive breeding, a request to transfer *C. niloticus* from South Africa to China, and a request from a Hong Kong trader for *C. porosus* for sale to China. In each case the CSG had intervened through the action of the Chairman, members and the Executive Officer to advise proponents of the CSG policy that we would not recommend transfer of exotic species into the range of other crocodilians for commercial purposes. Discussion followed on the complexity of this issue and the carefully worded nature of the CSG policy, key elements of which are underlined above. While the CSG has a firm opinion that transfer of exotics is not desirable we have neither the obligation or the capacity to police all crocodile transactions. After discussion the regional group agreed that CSG should encourage Regional Vice Chairman to monitor and respond to these issues, pointing out that fundamental responsibility for exotic transfers lay with the commercial proponents and government regulators of trade. The basic policy of CSG was recognized and confirmed. Alvaro Velasco requested that a short letter be sent to the head of the Venezuelan Management Authority clarifying the CSG position and the Exec. Officer undertook to do so.

**U.S. REGULATIONS ON IMPORTATION OF YACARE.** The Executive officer provided a summary of the current developments in this protracted affair. The US Management Authority has prepared draft regulations and resolved some internal conflicts regarding them. These draft regulations are expected to be released for public comment, but no firm timetable for this event is

known. Upon release for public comment CSG will be informed, and will in turn inform all interested members. Comments may be submitted by both US and non-US sources and will be the opportunity to shape the outcome. Some optimism was received from the response by the US to the submission by range states, made at the CITES meeting. However, realistically, it seems probable that US regulations will continue to be restrictive. The current political climate in the US government opposing excessive regulation may assist the process. Obdulio Menghi and Sergio Trachter indicated that their independent information confirmed this analysis. The only issue currently available for action was the timely release of the draft regulations for public comment and the regional group recommended that CSG continue to make polite enquiries about when this might occur. Should the regulations be unduly delayed then individual range states should intervene at a diplomatic level.

On a positive note, it was reported that CSG has established cordial relations with the US authority and that in response to an invitation to attend the present meeting, Dr. Susan Lieberman had asked that the outcome be communicated back to her. The Executive Officer undertook to prepare a letter.

**RESURGENCE OF ILLEGAL TRADE IN BLACK CAIMAN.** John Thorbjarnarson summarized recent information indicating that the local trade in black caiman in Amazonia, formerly restricted to trade of dried and salted meat, is expanding to include skins. We have known for some time that there is an extensive trade in meat of black caiman in Amazonia, where it is sold as fish. Meat has been traded from sources in Brazil, primarily up the Amazon river to Leticia in Colombia, as well as along the Amazon to Belem (Brazil) and Iquitos (Peru). Recent reports from researchers in the region suggest that the trade now occurs year round and may involve as much as several hundred tons of meat a year. Until recently skins were discarded, but there are now reports that buyers in Colombia are requesting that skins also be collected. Studies by Ronis da Silveira in Brazil suggest that the impact of this harvest may be somewhat mitigated as it is concentrated on subadult males found in the more open habitat, while females are restricted to very inaccessible areas. Nevertheless, the resurgence of illegal trade in black caiman at the moment when some populations may be recovering and sustainable use programs are being developed, is of grave concern. Additional reports of use of black caimans by indigenous people in Ecuador and Peru have been received.

After some discussion the regional group agreed that a very strong statement and action by the CSG, regional members and regional governments was required. It was noted that control of centralized warehouses and shipping points was far easier than controlling widely scattered subsistence hunters. The group recommended that a coordinated program to alert appropriate authorities about this issue should be undertaken as follows:

- Publicity about the situation in the CSG Newsletter.
- A letter from CSG to the Management Authority of each Amazonian Country (Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, Colombia and Venezuela) requesting their vigilance and action.
- A parallel advisement through the CITES Secretariat to members of the CITES Standing Committee and Animals Committee and the regional representative (CSG member Mirna Quero).
- Additional advice to consumer countries (Japan, Singapore, Italy, France, Germany and Taiwan) alerting them to the possibility of illegal sources of black caiman.

The Executive Officer and Obdulio Menghi agreed to coordinate the production of the necessary letters. It was finally noted that the meeting of the Treaty for Amazonian Cooperation will be held later this year in Leticia, Colombia, which would provide a further avenue for investigating this issue.

**APPLICATION OF HONDURAS TO REGISTER A CAPTIVE BREEDING FACILITY FOR *CROCODYLUS ACUTUS*.** A proposal to list Cocodrilos Clal Continental "Finca la Sierra" of San Pedro Sula, Honduras, was received by the CITES Secretariat in late 1994. In accordance with Resolution Conf. 8.15 Annex 3. the Secretariat has notified the Parties of this request and sent the proposal for expert review to CSG and WCMC. In response the Executive Officer replied to CITES in a letter of 25 March 1995 reporting the deliberations of the CSG as reported in the minutes and Newsletter. The proposal under consideration is essentially the same as that submitted informally for CSG review in March 1994. The absence of any detailed description of regulatory procedures by the Honduras Management Authority was noted and a series of concrete recommendations made to make up this deficiency were presented to CITES and copied to the Honduras Management Authority. Additional reviews have been solicited by IUCN Trade program from other CSG members and submitted to the Secretariat. Obdulio Menghi informed the regional meeting that two countries, USA and Venezuela, have advised the Secretariat of objections to this proposal. They requested additional information and drew attention to several points requiring attention from the Management Authority of Honduras. Noting the proposed meeting the CITES Animals Committee in Guatemala in September 1995 and the associated CITES training seminar in Honduras, the regional meeting suggested that this might be an opportunity for CITES and the CSG to examine first hand what mechanisms are in place and proposed to establish effective crocodilian management in Honduras. The executive officer was asked to communicate with the Honduras Management Authority informing them of these discussions and offering CSG expert assistance.

**PROGRESS OF CROCODILIAN MANAGEMENT IN ECUADOR.** It was recalled that at the 9th meeting of the Conference of the Parties, the proposal of Ecuador to transfer *M. niger* to Appendix II for ranching was approved subject to two conditions; 1) Ecuador establish an export quota of zero until a management system was in place. 2) That the CSG would review the management system and recommend to Ecuador and to the Secretariat what further changes in the export quota should be approved. Obdulio Menghi noted that the official version of the CITES minutes may not adequately reflect the binding nature of these conditions on Ecuador. The Executive Officer reported that immediately following the CITES meeting a letter noting these conditions and advising the Secretariat of this situation was sent to CITES. The absence of the representatives from the Ecuadorian Management Authority at the regional meeting was noted and regret expressed that this fine opportunity for information exchange had been lost. (Following the regional meeting a report was received indicating that a schedule for development of the ranch has been approved but no information is forthcoming on the nature of proposed regulatory controls.) To follow up, the Executive Officer was asked to draft a letter to Ecuador, copied to CITES specifying our understanding of the situation and requesting information on their progress.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 6.20 pm after noting that this may be the shortest and most efficient CSG meeting on record. The evident benefits of delegating regional issues to regional meetings, while keeping the whole CSG informed, was noted.