

Crocodile Specialist Group Steering Committee Meeting

“Domaine de la Validaine”, Montelimar, France

19 June 2006 (8.00am – 4.00 pm)

Information Item

Regional Report – Africa

Report on Regional Activities

South Africa

There has been considerable activity at the southern extreme of crocodile distribution in Africa:

- Hannes Botha completed an MSc on crocodile ecology at Arabie Dam and has continued on crocodile projects for Mpumalanga Parks Board & Dept. Water Affairs, relating to crocodiles in the Olifants River system, in the face of major projects to raise dam levels and alter the flow regimes. Comment by Fritz: the dam level was raised earlier this year and with late torrential rains filled suddenly within a few days. This caused severe disorientation in the crocodiles. Many congregated at the dam wall and few jumped the wall. Two of the victims were submitted for post-mortem examination. They showed internal injuries but also severe, apparently stress-related, osteoporosis. The effect of raising water levels on crocodiles needs to be studied more closely.
- Another PhD on the effects of the recent low water inflows into the St. Lucia system is planned, pending agreement between University of KwaZulu/Natal and the Greater St. Lucia Wetland authorities.
- Several new members have been recruited among the staff of KZN Wildlife department, particularly at St Lucia Crocodile Centre and at the National Zoo, Pretoria now in communication with CSG Zoos and Education group
- The South African crocodile producers have “gelled” in the last two years and now have one producer association with quite a large membership which has been making proposals for more communication with their counterparts in Zambia and Zimbabwe and providing input into discussions on live exports outside range states and *ex situ* ranching, etc.

Botswana

- Dr. Alison Leslie and her team in the Conservation Ecology Department at Stellenbosch University (South Africa) have continued with their several research projects in the Okavango. Some of their results will be presented at this meeting. This programme is winding down and the team is possibly looking to start up in Zambia.

Mozambique

- In southern Mozambique the major issue is the raising of the level of Massingir Dam - this has implications for the management of crocodiles back into Kruger NP in SA. This area has some protection and carries very high densities of crocodiles in the dry season. D. Swanepoel and M. Wishart are involved there on a project to predict and mitigate the effect of the change in water level on the crocodile population, and potential for community use through sale of eggs.
- In northern Mozambique some survey work has been carried out in Niassa Reserve, Lugenda River and tributaries as part of a larger predator project and some HCC is reported.
- One new farm is starting in central Mozambique, now four operating, bulk of production from Lake Cahora Bassa, partly involved in *ex situ* ranching with South African producers.
- The HCC position in Lake Cahora Bassa and lower Zambezi is serious - report by Anderson *et al.* as part of a larger document on wildlife management in Mozambique.
- Mozambique Government has allocated quotas for 400 wild harvested problem animals in Cahora Bassa and balance remains to be allocated. Some of these will be captured as breeding

stock to the CB farm. Less than 100 shot since CITES quota was increased (2003) and apparently none exported.

- Aerial and spotlight surveys are planned for western end of Lake Cahora Bassa shore in July/August 2006 as part of AWF heartland project

Namibia

- Namibia successfully downlisted their population from Appendix I to Appendix II (Resolution Conf 9.24) at CITES CoP13 with the aim of sustainable use of the wild population in Caprivi.
- A PhD project entitled “Management and conservation of Nile crocodiles outside of protected areas: ecology, socioeconomics and sustainable utilisation” was started in Caprivi region in April on the Kwando, Kuvango, Zambezi and Chobe Rivers. This project will also operate on the Zambian side of the river once research permits have been issued. There are plans for community participation and capture of problem crocodiles.
- HCC conflict data collected by government agencies has been provided for the HCC database.

Zimbabwe

- Production of crocodiles continues to increase from ranching and farming and there are new entrants to the industry so there is some pressure on the wild egg resource and proposals to open previously unused areas including national parks for the collection of wild eggs.
- A major survey of the shared crocodile and hippo populations on the Zambezi will be carried out with Zambia in August 2006.

Zambia

- Zambia successfully obtained a wild export quota for their crocodile population at CITES CoP13 with the aim of managing problem animals using sport/trophy hunters and operators.
- The proposed new crocodile policy and management plan proposed and drafted by ZAWA and ZaCFA has been approved and comes into force from mid-2006.
- African Wildlife Foundation based in Zambia sponsored a review of crocodile populations in the Zambezi valley, which indicated a shared population with Zimbabwe of at least 10,200 animals of all sizes between Kariba and Cahora Bassa in Mozambique.
- A second phase of this project comprising aerial and boat-based surveys is proposed for August 2006.
- ZAWA has obtained World Bank funding for biodiversity work including crocodile and hippo surveys in the Kafue system and these will be carried out in September
- A joint crocodile population and HCC survey is scheduled for Bangweulu Swamps in August/September 2006.

Malawi

- A combined crocodile population survey and HCC survey was carried out over 150 km of the Lower Shire river at the end of 2005. This indicated that the crocodile population of this area has declined quite markedly over the last 19 years (now around 2000 animals) while the HCC levels have remained constant over the last decade at 2.7 incidents/month.
- The wild harvest of 200 potentially problem crocodiles/year continues and the ranching sector is moribund.

Madagascar

- CSG-endorsed crocodile management plan drafted in 2004 with the government has still not been signed or acted upon by the relevant Minister.
- The discrepancy between the exports of one ranch and their facilities and stock holdings was raised by CSG with CITES Secretariat but without any apparent response.
- Reports of declining wild populations, hunted under the guise of “problem crocodiles” and a general breakdown of any systematic management have continued.

Tanzania

- The Tanzanian wild harvest of problem crocodiles has continued each year. There are some persistent but unsubstantiated reports of hunting for these animals inside protected areas and that the efficiency of recovery is low so that more animals are killed than the number exported.

Kenya

- A project on the status and distribution of crocodiles in Kenya has recently started under the auspices of the National Museums of Kenya.
- Kenya Wildlife Service is reported to be interested in a national scale survey of the status of crocodiles as it has been many years since any survey work at this scale was done. The ongoing, and apparently increasing HCC problem is also contributing to this issue.
- A “wildlife farmers” lobby group has been formed to push the sustainable use of wild species, crocodiles are currently prominent in this.
- A new crocodile farm has been started with Korean investment.

Uganda

- High profile HCC issues have continued on Lake Victoria and other major rivers and lakes. In response Nature Uganda and staff of UWA have planned a major national scale survey but this is currently held up awaiting funding.
- Ranching is moribund although one ranch still holds some stock.

Ethiopia

- The government farm at Arba Minch has continued to destock.
- Hunting concessions with crocodiles on quota have been issued for part of the shoreline of Lakes Chamo and Abaya. This caused an incident between some safari operators and the government that CSG was called to provide technical advice for. The trophy offtake of crocodiles from Ethiopia is small.

Liberia

- Sapo National Park: This national park in the eastern part of the country offers still very good forest habitat for *C. cataphractus* and *O. tetraspis*, particularly in the Sinoe River system. Following a forest re-assessment program conducted conjointly by FFI and SCNL since 2001 and due to the results and propositions of a biomonitoring program conducted in 2001 and 2002 (Waitkuwait and Suter) the Government of Liberia has extended the Sapo National Park at his western side in 2003. The new park boundaries including this western extension cover now the whole Sinoe River basin providing a good potential to protect these two crocodile species. During the biomonitoring program the presence of both species could be confirmed, unfortunately only in a low density, but data are insufficient to give more detailed quantitative data. The intactness of other forest dwelling mammalian and bird species populations was nevertheless surprisingly good and the low density of crocodilians is not understood. Waitkuwait supposes that the rivers in remote forest areas, as Sinoe River and its tributaries in Sapo NP, has been used as hiding refuges and fishing grounds for the local population during the civil war.

Côte d'Ivoire

- Abidjan National Zoo: Recent information (March 2006) confirms that there are still two captive breeding groups of *C. cataphractus* (about 50 specimen) and *C. niloticus* (about 15 specimen) living in the enclosures of this zoo. Probably the *C. cataphractus* breeding group is one of the largest group in captivity of this species. These captive breeding groups have been established in 1990 by Waitkuwait and Shwedick. The breeding males and females descend from hatchlings of eggs collected in the wild during the early 1980s.

Gabon

- Gamba protected area complex: there are for sure excitingly intact *C. cataphractus* populations left in several lakes and riversystems (particularly, lake Divangui) between the Loango and Moukalaba-Doudou National Parks in the southwest of Gabon. Waitkuwait and Pauwels plan to undertake a quick-survey in late September this year.
- Ivindo National Park: Another confirmation for still very intact *C. cataphractus* populations comes from the Djidji River system in a very remote area inside the Ivindo National Park in the northeast of Gabon.
- In general one can conclude that Gabon has certainly the most intact *C. cataphractus* populations in the Congo basin area as it has the remotest forest portions left because of the low human population density. 80% of Gabon is covered by dense humid forest, which offer the necessary habitat for this species. Gabon has a good potential to protect this species.
- The situation is much more critical for *C. niloticus*.
- Lambarene: *Osteolaemus tetraspis* is quite common everywhere in Gabon, but heavily hunted for bushmeat. In December 2005, Waitkuwait travelled with a canoe and a small boat on the Ogooué river around Lambarene and found killed *Osteolaemus* in each riveran village we stopped by.
- Libreville: Each Saturday, Waitkuwait finds parts of this animal when he inspects the weekly market in Libreville (particularly on the market of Oloumi). The same is true for the market in Port Gentil, second big town of Gabon situated 100 km south of Libreville close to the Ogooué delta.
- Oliver Pauwels has two notes in Hamadryad on the diet of Gabonese *C. cataphractus* and *Osteolaemus*, respectively. With the already available data from Congo, diet seems to be the only well known thing for both species in the area. But data are lacking concerning their distribution and local abundance, and representation in protected areas (cf the report in CSG Newsletter). Field surveys are the most urgent conservation action. Surveys in national parks and surveys for *C. niloticus* seem to be the first priority for Gabon. Then comes *C. cataphractus*. OP does not regard *Osteolaemus* as an endangered species in Gabon.

Prepared by: Richard Fergusson (Regional Chairman, Africa), with assistance from Ekke Waitkuwait (Vice Chairman, West Africa), Fritz Huchzermeyer (Vice Chairman, Veterinary Science) and Oliver Pauwels.

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