

THE MUGGERS OF SRI LANKA—CONFLICTS AND CONSERVATION

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The dry zone of Sri Lanka contains one of the largest populations of mugger crocodiles in the world (*Crocodylus palustris* - globally listed as ‘Vulnerable’). The island also has an ever increasing human population, and over the past half century, the number of humans and livestock using natural water bodies in the dry zone has increased significantly. This sharing of an essential, but a limited resource has created a ‘Human-Crocodile Conflict’ in these regions.

Between 2008 and 2013, we conducted day and night time surveys for crocodiles at over 700 locations and simultaneous KAP (Knowledge, Attitude and Practice) surveys among 500 inhabitants within 10 administrative districts of the island.

Healthy populations of crocodiles were noted in all districts, but they were regularly killed due to fear and as a precaution of preventing future attacks (48 incidents); hunted for meat and skin (117 incidents); subjected to road accidents (6 incidents) and eggs collected (29 incidents). On the other hand, 26 attacks by crocodiles on humans (with 12 being fatal) and 36 attacks on pet animals and livestock were also recorded. Based on the results we identified five areas with a substantially high human-crocodile conflict, and propose them as ‘Crocodile Vigilant Zones’ (CVZ): Weerawila-Hambantota-Tissamaharamaya, Kumana-Panama-Lahugala, Bibila-Nilgala-Ampara, Udawalawa-Thanamalwila-Lunugamvehera and Anuradhapura-Kurunegala-Dambulla. Eighteen crocodile exclusion enclosures were built with the involvement of the community in two CVZs to physically segregate the two components— humans and mugger crocodiles, and concurrent awareness programmes were conducted. Recommendations to mitigate the conflict will be discussed.