

IUCN Indian Crocodiles & World Crocodile Day

Crocodiles are large semiaquatic reptiles that live throughout the tropics in Africa, Asia, the Americas and Australia. There are a total of 23 known crocodile species, of which 7 are currently listed as Critically Endangered, 4 as Vulnerable, 12 as Least Risk as per the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

Crocodylian Species Found in India

Discussed below are a few crocodylian species which are found in India along with their status as per IUCN, CITES and Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

- **Mugger**
 - Restricted to the Indian subcontinent, Mugger or Marsh crocodiles are generally **found in freshwater habitats** including lakes, marshes and rivers
 - They may also be found in coastal saltwater lagoons and estuaries
 - Both young and adult mugger crocodiles dig burrows where they retreat when the temperature drops below 5°C
 - While the **Mugger crocodile hatchlings are pale olive with black spots**, the **adults are dark olive to grey or brown**
 - They are an egg-laying and hole-nesting species
 - It preys on fish, reptiles, birds and mammals
 - The main cause of their vulnerable status is habitat destruction, fragmentation, and transformation, fishing activities and use of crocodile parts for medicinal purposes
 - **This species of crocodile are already extinct in Myanmar and Bhutan.** Refer to the table below for their status:

IUCN Red List	Vulnerable
CITES	Appendix I
Wildlife Protection Act, 1972	Schedule I

- **Saltwater Crocodile**
 - Also known as a man-eater, the saltwater crocodiles are believed to be the **largest crocodile species living on Earth**
 - They are **also known as the estuarine crocodile**
 - In India, it **inhabits Odisha's Bhitarkanika National Park, the Sundarbans in West Bengal and the Andamans and Nicobar Islands.** They can also be found across Southeast Asia and northern Australia
 - It is capable of prevailing over almost any animal that enters its territory and ambushes most of its prey and then drowns or swallows it as a whole

- Its reputation as a man-eater is one of the biggest reasons for its hunting and a threat to its existence. It is also hunted for its skin and another major cause of its decreasing population is loss of habitat
- The table below shows its global status:

IUCN Red List	Least Concern
CITES	Appendix I
Wildlife Protection Act, 1972	Schedule I

- **Gharial**

- The gharial, **also known as the gavial** is the **longest of all living crocodilians**
- They have **long and thin snouts which resemble an earthen pot** (*known as “Ghara” in Hindi*), and thus, are called gharial
- It currently inhabits rivers in the plains of the northern part of the Indian subcontinent
- The Chambal river in the northern slopes of the Vindhya mountains is known as the primary habitat of gharials
- The gharial population is estimated to have declined from 5,000–10,000 individuals in 1946 to fewer than 250 individuals in 2006
- The **main causes of this decline** include **illegal sand mining, poaching, habitat destruction, floods and massive scale fishing operations**
- Given below is the status of Gharial:

IUCN Red List	Critically Endangered
CITES	Appendix I
Wildlife Protection Act, 1972	Schedule I

What is Appendix I of CITES?

The species threatened with extinction are included in Appendix I of CITES. Trade of specimens of these species is permitted only in exceptional circumstances

Know more about the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES) at the linked article.

What is Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972?

This schedule covered endangered species, which need rigorous protection and therefore, the harshest penalties for violation of the law are under this Schedule.

Visit the linked article and read in detail about the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

Crocodile Census in India

- In January 2020, the **crocodile census** was held in **Bhitarkanika National Park** of Orisha, and its nearby areas in Kendrapara district.

- 22 teams to count the crocodiles in all the creeks and rivers within the park and its nearby areas were formed by the officials and **1,757 crocodiles were found**. This was slightly more than **last year's count which was 1,742 crocodiles**.
- During the census, **620 hatchlings, 325 yearlings, 288 juveniles, 185 sub-adult and 339 adult crocodiles were found**.
- The enumerators **also sighted** around **12 albino crocodiles and four giant crocodiles** more than 20 feet long in the water bodies

Human-Crocodile Conflict

It is important for people to understand the existence of mankind relies on a balance between nature and wildlife. Killing and hunting of animals will not just degrade the wildlife and environment but also harm human existence.

The biggest cause of the decline in the population of Indian crocodiles is the fact that their habitats are being destroyed for selfish human reasons. Urbanisation and encroachment of humans on the river banks and marshy areas are the key causes of the human-crocodile conflict.

In India, Vadodara, Kota and Bhitarkanika are considered as the major human-crocodile conflict hotspots. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are also a part of this list.

World Crocodile Day

June 17th, every year is observed as World Crocodile Day. It is a global awareness campaign to highlight the plight of endangered crocodiles and alligators around the world.

As a measure to conserve crocodiles in India, the Crocodile Conservation Project was launched in 1975 in different Indian states. It was a result of this conservation programme that the saltwater crocodiles which were **96 in count in 1976, increased to 1640 by 2012**.

The concerned authorities should conduct awareness campaigns to highlight the plight of endangered crocodiles. Modern technology must be incorporated in the future census to know the exact count of crocodiles across the country.

IUCN-SSC Crocodile Specialist Group (CSG)

The IUCN SSC Crocodile Specialist Group (CSG) is a worldwide network of biologists, wildlife managers, government officials, independent researchers, non-government (NGO) representatives, farmers, traders, tanners, fashion leaders, and private companies actively involved in the conservation of the world's 23 living species of alligators, crocodiles, caimans and gharial in the wild.

It was founded in 1971 and its main mission is to assist IUCN and Species Survival Commission (SSC) in the conservation, management and sustainability of crocodiles across the globe.