

Knowledge of locals and interaction with crocodiles in the Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve, Mexico

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Abstract: Contact between wildlife and humans has become frequent due to the displacement and growth of the human populations; therefore, it is necessary to work with locals to know their relationship (knowledge and interaction) with wildlife and strengthen the information they have, to guide people to a satisfactory co-existence with wildlife. This study aimed to document and analyze the knowledge and interaction that residents of two villages at Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve (SKBR) have about crocodiles. Semi-open interviews were conducted in Punta Allen (n = 71) and Punta Herrero (n = 13) during August-October 2019 and November-December 2020. Local in both villages tend to be unaware of the existence of the two crocodile species (*Crocodylus moreletii* and *C. acutus*) that live in the SKBR. In most cases they do not know their differences; 100% of respondents refer the presence of crocodiles (regardless of species) in the mangroves of lagoons and canals, followed by savannas and the beach. According to more than 50% of respondents, crocodiles are visible throughout the year, however particular cases remarks some months more regularly. The tourist activity targeting crocodiles is mainly carried out in Punta Allen, but it is not offered regularly; close to 70% of respondents say it is not a relevant activity and do not believe that this activity can be improved. Likewise, the interviewed people believes that crocodiles are dangerous or not attractive to them, despite this 70% know that they have an ecological importance. In addition, 85% assures that the population of crocodiles is currently greater than in the past. The villager's knowledge about crocodiles seems to be fairly good, however there is a need to strengthen and offer more broadly information about their biology, importance and conservation. Touristic activities following adequate guidelines may become an important source of incomes.

Keywords: *Crocodylus acutus*, *Crocodylus moreletii*, Human-crocodile interactions, Citizen science

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