

# **Sinking your teeth into crocodile conservation**

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***Abstract:*** Conservation is not just about wildlife, it is about people. The success of any wildlife conservation program relatively parallels the involvement and support from local communities, thus working alongside communities and partner organizations is imperative to empower people with the knowledge of coexistence and sustainability to ensure long-term conservation efforts. Moreover, continuous collaboration and communication with local and national governments can ensure data collected from one's scientific investigations will be prioritized in regard to policy decisions regarding wildlife and their habitat (= translational ecology). In this presentation, I will be discussing the conservation efforts of the Crocodile Research Coalition (CRC), a Belize based non-profit that works with local, national and regional stakeholders to ensure long-term conservation and management of crocodiles and their habitat. Our program can be generalized into 2 components: 1) research projects that not only focuses on crocodiles, but the surrounding flora and fauna that range from conservation biology, genetics, eco-toxicology, and population ecology, and 2) educational outreach that consists of active media and social media presence, participating in community events and reaching out to schools, educational material, and the creation of games and displays to creatively reach out to people of all ages to provide the facts of the two species of crocodiles in Belize, the American crocodile (*Crocodylus acutus*) and Morelet's crocodile (*Crocodylus moreletii*). This holistic approach of crocodile conservation and management has furthered assisted us in identifying wildlife champions, especially through mentorship programs such as Next Gen Croc. Moreover, the aforementioned efforts have proved successful in local community stewardship of protecting crocodiles and their environment in our location, Placencia Lagoon.

***Keywords:*** *Crocodylus acutus*, *Crocodylus moreletii*, Wildlife education, Community outreach

***Type of Presentation:*** oral

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