

Wildlife tourism value of crocodylians in relation to consumptive values

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Abstract: Wildlife tourism can provide economic benefits to local communities and conservation benefits to species if carried out in a responsible and sustainable manner. Large predators have received increasing interest from the wildlife tourism industry in recent years and some populations/communities have been assigned high tourism values in the literature. One group of large predators that has not been studied in this regard is the crocodylians, even though they have been the focus of dedicated wildlife tourism operations in many countries for decades. We conducted the first analysis of the wildlife tourism value of crocodylians using a unique dataset of financial information from a wildlife tourism operation in South America coupled with data from a long-term mark-recapture study. We also compared the estimated monetary values of individual crocodylians from our study with the values of individual crocodylians estimated from publicly available data provided by the crocodylian farming and hunting industries. We found that between 2009 and 2014, farmed *Alligator mississippiensis* in Florida, Louisiana, and Texas had average individual gross values of US\$140.98-\$583.06, while farmed *Crocodylus niloticus* in Zimbabwe were valued at US\$312.25-\$558.97. Meanwhile, hunted *A. mississippiensis* in Florida and Louisiana were valued at US\$173.03-\$392.19. During the same time period, *Melanosuchus niger* that were the focus of wildlife tourism near a village in Guyana were valued at US\$385.53-\$1051.69. Our results demonstrate that non-consumptive crocodylian tourism is capable of generating, at a minimum, comparable amounts of money per individual relative to consumptive crocodylian industries, and may even generate much more money in certain contexts. Further developing crocodylian tourism in countries where crocodylian populations are threatened or endangered could therefore be a viable method of supporting conservation efforts.

Keywords: *Melanosuchus niger*, Guyana, farming, hunting

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