

Human animal conflict in Sri Lanka with special reference to Crocodile attacks

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Abstract: Sri Lankans, especially those in rural areas with farm and domestic animals face conflicts with *Crocodylus palustris*, *Crocodylus porosus*, other megafauna (elephants, leopards, bears, buffaloes), and highly venomous snakes, that can cause minor to grievous injuries. Victims may be left with permanent disability of varying degrees, or in a few cases an attack may be fatal. This communication reviews the pattern of crocodile attacks from surveys conducted from 2009 - 2011. Ancient traditional medical works of the country indicate that Human Crocodile Conflict (HCC) has existed historically, as some medical manuscripts (e.g., *Sārārtha Sangrahaya*, written around 337-365 ACE) record medicaments for crocodile bites. Additionally, the Great Chronicle of Sri Lanka, the *Mahāvamsa*, (6th century ACE) records perhaps one of the first references to the existence of man-eating crocodiles in the country. During our surveys conducted on HCC from south to north Sri Lanka, we observed approximately 177 cases; 148 (84%) were male victims, 27 (15%) were female and 2 cases where sex was not recorded. Fifty (28%) were fatal. We visited houses of 131 victims, discussed the incident and subsequently, visited locations where the attacks took place. Fifty-eight (45%) attacks by *Crocodylus palustris* took place in manmade water bodies, 45 (35%) in small rivers (Oya), and 22 (17%) in large rivers. The highest frequency of attacks 65 (50%) were when people were bathing. Legs were most vulnerable to crocodile attack (n=45 (47%)), followed by arms (n=25 (19%)). In 12 cases the trunk including the chest was attacked, and 4 cases where buttocks were attacked. Ninety-eight (93%) victims had been dragged into the water by the crocodile. It is worth noting that 90% of victims were aware of the presence of crocodiles before the attack, and 64% of the victims interviewed reported routinely visiting these water bodies on a regular basis at similar times to engage in activities such as fishing, bathing, and washing clothing prior to attacks. We would like to note that many recent attacks since the completion of these surveys are excluded from this communication. We recommend education of the behavior and intelligence of crocodiles, as the best approach to reducing and mitigating conflicts with humans.

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