

Human-crocodile interactions along the central coast of Jalisco, Mexico

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Abstract: In Mexico, human and crocodile populations are often in contact as both use the same coastal habitats. Jalisco is the state of Mexico with the highest level of negative interactions between people and crocodiles. The municipality of Tomatlán, located along the central coast of Jalisco has a large population of *Crocodylus acutus*, and encounters between humans and crocodiles are reported. In 2008, a crocodile sanctuary (Spanish: cocodrilario) was founded with the aim of conservation, tourism, environmental education, research and management of problematic individuals. Thus, research began on human-crocodile interactions and the relationship between both species. In this study, we conducted 62 interviews with members of the local community (farmers, cattle ranchers, fishermen and inhabitants living close to crocodile habitat). The mean age of interviewees was 47 years old. Interactions were reported from 2003 onwards and were classified as follows: sighting, predation of livestock or pets, and bite or mortality to human. The results obtained indicate that 100% of the people surveyed have observed crocodiles, 55.3% have experienced an interaction, 26.1% have suffered predation of their livestock or pets, and 15.3 have suffered bites (10 people) of which two people died. Based on interview responses, all serious interaction resulting in bites or deaths happened during daylight hours, and crocodiles were estimated to measure an average of three meters in length. It is important to mention that 68% of respondents believe that there is an overpopulation of crocodiles, and 80% think that crocodiles should be relocated or hunted. Although crocodile bites to people are infrequent, community members see all crocodiles as dangerous and do not know how to coexist alongside them safely. For this reason, a program of attention to human-crocodile conflicts should be implemented in the area, and environmental education campaigns are urgently needed to inform the community of the importance and benefits that crocodiles offer to the local ecosystem.

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