

Twenty-five years of communitarian conservation of the American crocodile (*Crocodylus acutus*) in La Manzanilla estuary, Jalisco, Mexico

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Abstract: Since 1995, the Ejido La Manzanilla's community, on the pacific coast of Jalisco, Mexico, has actively participated in the conservation of *Crocodylus acutus* and the La Manzanilla mangrove and estuary. The timeline of this American crocodile communitarian conservation experience is presented. The main dates that shaped this history and explain community organization strength are highlighted. Natural disasters, such the tsunami of 1995 and two droughts drove the community to protect the mangrove and start ecotourism. In 2008 starts the formalization of the Environment Conservation and Management Unit "UMA Ejido La Manzanilla" (SEMARNAT-UMA-EX-226-JAL), for the protection and rehabilitation of the *Crocodylus acutus* population and its habitat, in 190 ha of mangrove. The UMA strengthens the communitarian conservation project since it considers both crocodiles protection and their ecotourism exploitation, through sightings and interpretive tours, on foot and by boat. The ecotourism income supports most of the UMA's ecoturistic operation nowadays, which generates up to 20 sources of employment during the tourist season. In 2017, the crocodile's communitarian museum opens, where are exhibited some whole *Crocodylus acutus* skeletons of over 4 meters, rescued in the UMA. In 2019, the environment ministry (SEMARNAT) recognizes this scientific and educational effort with the registration of the "UMA Ejido La Manzanilla's Museographic Collection" (DGVC-CC-318-19). In 2020 begins the museum's extension, with support from the Dedicated Grant Mechanism for Indigenous Peoples and local communities (DGM), funded by the World Bank's Forest Investment Program (FIP) and operated by the Rainforest Alliance NGO.

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