

Juancho, a wild inhabitant of the metropolitan zone of Tampico: analysis of the perception of basic education students about the Mexican crocodile (*Crocodylus moreletii*)

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Abstract: The southeast of Tamaulipas is made up of a complex lagoon system. However, the economic and social development of urban growth in the Tampico Metropolitan Zone, within the Altamira, Ciudad Madero and Tampico townships, has achieved that the infrastructure of communication and transport roads, as well as housing units, they are currently overlapping with this aquatic environment, which turns out to be the natural habitat of the Mexican crocodile (*Crocodylus moreletii*). The presence of crocodiles in this region has become so common, that the inhabitants have colloquially named them as "Juancho", and have even been used as an iconic emblem. What apparently, has led the inhabitants to have losing their respect as dangerous animals for citizens, and when this reptile walks on the streets of the city, the human curiosity has caused interactions that put them at risk. For this reason, our research focused on knowing what is the perception that elementary school students have over the crocodile. To know this, without any influence of previous information from an expert about the risks that exist, students were asked to draw what they know as crocodile. Based on the analysis of the drawing proposed by previous studies, the drawings were classified into two types: Negative Perception and Positive Perception, each with three categories (feeding attitude, attitude showing teeth and attitude opening mouth; and smiling attitude, accessory nice things and common family environment, respectively). The results indicate that about 70% of children see the Mexican crocodile with a positive attitude of low danger. This perception is confusing for them, given the limited information they have about the risks that exist, so we suggest that environmental education campaigns be carried out so that the population knows about the respect that the crocodile deserves.

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