

Transfer of the American Crocodile *Crocodylus acutus* population in the Bahia Cispata, Tinajones, La Balsa and Sectores Alendanos in the District of Cordoba, Colombia from Appendix I to Appendix II for the purposes of ranching

Proponent: Colombia

Summary: The American Crocodile *Crocodylus acutus* is a widely distributed species, occurring in 17 range States in southern North America, Central America, the Caribbean and northern South America. The population of Cuba is in Appendix II; all other populations are in Appendix I. The species is classified as Vulnerable in the IUCN Red List (2012).

In Colombia, the species is found in a number of mangrove swamps and river deltas, including Cispata Bay, Tinajones, La Balsa and surrounding area of the department on Department of Cordoba. The mangroves extend over a total area of almost 115km². In 2006, these and the surrounding area were declared an Integrated Management District (DMI-BC): hereafter referred to as Cispata Bay or DMI-BC. A proposal for the same area was submitted to CoP16.

Since 2003 the species has been the subject of an active management programme in Cispata Bay, involving the construction of artificial nesting areas and head-starting based on release of juveniles hatched from eggs taken from the wild. Around 2500 juveniles were released in total between 2004 and 2014. Fertile eggs collected from nests and eggs artificially incubated to the point of hatching have also been "released"; with a hatching rate of almost 70% from those artificially incubated.

The current population is believed to be between 800 and 2356 individuals based on surveys covering 14km², or 80% of its habitat, the remainder being inaccessible. The population structure is considered to reflect a recovering or stable population. It is possible that the population has reached carrying capacity, and individuals are thought likely to be migrating out of the area.

Management measures in line with *Res. Conf. 11.16 (Rev. CoP15)* on Ranching are detailed in the proposal and a management plan is said to be under development (but not supplied). Relevant parts of this Resolution and responses to them in the supporting statement are:

b) **i) The programme must be primarily beneficial to the conservation of the local population**
Benefits to the local community will provide incentives to continue protecting this population. The area can act as a replicable model.

ii) all products (including live specimens) must be adequately identified

Details on marking of eggs through to hatchlings and skins are provided. Skin marking will follow the CITES universal marking system and will include a label "ACUTUS CISPATA COLOMBIA", which will distinguish skins from those originating in the 7 registered captive breeding facilities for the species in Colombia.

iii) the programme must have in place appropriate inventories, harvest controls and population monitoring mechanisms

The Cispata Bay population, including nests, has been monitored using standardized methods since 2003, led by the local competent environmental authority (CVS). No detail is provided on harvest controls except that only authorized ASOCAIMAN members will be permitted to harvest eggs. A management plan under development will include guidelines for egg collection from a sampled area (this management plan is not currently available). Trade quotas will be established and adaptively managed based on monitoring, as will the populations of individuals to be reintroduced to the wild.

iv) adequate numbers of animals must be returned to the wild

Progeny from 10% of all eggs collected will be returned to the wild after reaching approximately 100cm size in controlled conditions. This figure will be revised based on population monitoring.

c) **i) details of the marking system must be submitted**

Details of the marking system have been provided.

ii) a list of products must be provided

It appears that skins are the only products that will be exported.

iii) a description of marking methods to be provided

Details are provided.

iv) an inventory of current stocks

Current stocks are 857 juveniles and sub adults. The intention is for these to be exported with an experimental quota of 200 skins per year until the stocks are exhausted.

d) i) off-take should not be detrimental

Details of the proposed offtake have not been provided however, the local community has been collecting eggs (with replacement) for over 10 years and the population appears to be stable or increasing. Management will be adapted on the basis of monitoring.

ii) the likely of biological and economic success of the operation

The DMI-BC has demonstrated the potential biological success over the past 10 years with the recovery and stabilisation of the population. Sustainable use will allow costs to be internalised for long term economic success. Income will also be generated through ecotourism, research and education.

iii) there should be an assurance of no cruelty

The proponent states that humane methods will be used that guarantee no cruelty and comply with national legislation.

iv) there should be documentary evidence that the programme is beneficial to the wild population

The community conservation project that has been running for over 10 years has reintroduced animals and also built artificial nests, many of which are being used by female crocodiles on the a regular basis. The community group ASCOCAIMAN is predominantly composed of ex-hunters, who are now conserving instead of hunting the crocodiles. It is believed the area may serve as a replicable model.

v) there should be assurance that the above conditions will continue to be met

The programme has been running successfully over the past 10 years and a management plan is in development.

Overall, the IUCN/SSC Crocodile Specialist Group considers the proposed management measures to be sound².

Regarding implementation of *Res. Conf. 11.16 (Rev CoP15)*: recent problems with the management of *Caiman crocodilus fuscus* farming in Colombia have been identified, in particular the export of ranched and wild-harvested specimens declared illegally as captive-bred. At the 66th Meeting of the CITES Standing Committee Colombia and the EU made a joint declaration in which Colombia undertook to take action to ensure the legal origin of the traded specimens, to be implemented by 31 May 2016³. It is not clear to what extent these actions have been implemented.

Analysis: The *Crocodylus acutus* population of Cispata Bay, Colombia, remains small (<2500 individuals), with a restricted range; however the population appears to be increasing or stable, and possibly at carrying capacity and does not appear to be threatened at present. Most management conditions set out in *Res. Conf. 11.16 (Rev. CoP15)* appear to be in place, although some details on key elements such as harvesting controls and offtake are not available. It is possible that these will be included in the management plan under development.

References:

Information not referenced in the Summary section is from the Supporting Statement.

¹ CoP16 Prop. 23. (2013) Transfer of the population of the Bay of Cispata, municipality of San Antero, Department of Córdoba, Republic of Colombia, from Appendix I to Appendix II. <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/cop/16/prop/E-CoP16-Prop-23.pdf>. Viewed on 24th June 2016.

² IUCN/SSC Crocodile Specialist Group (2016) *In litt.* to IUCN/TRAFFIC Analysis Team, Cambridge, UK.

³ SC66 (2016) Summary record. <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/com/sc/66/ExSum/E-SC66-SR.pdf>. Viewed on 24th June 2016.