

Status of Crocodiles in Andhra Pradesh

B Srinivas, K Vara Prasad
and BC Choudhury

THE STATE OF ANDHRA PRADESH historically supported populations of mugger (*Crocodylus palustris*) and saltwater crocodiles (*C. porosus*). However, the saltwater crocodile became extinct in the state by the late 1940's and the mugger population had been much reduced by the mid-1970's.

In 1976, the Andhra Pradesh Forest Department became part of the Indian Crocodile Conservation Project. During the winters of 1976-77 a detailed survey was carried out of crocodile populations and their habitat in the two Godavari and Krishna river systems and other many reservoirs. The survey revealed the total population estimation to be less than 30 adult mugger crocodiles with only six breeding females. This was a sorry state, considering the state had many suitable habitats for mugger crocodiles and the mangrove areas in deltaic region of the state are still good habitats for saltwater crocodile.

In 1977, a crocodile breeding and rearing centre was set up at Nehru Zoological Park, and subsequently satellite rearing centres set up at Vishakapatnam Zoo,

Nagarjunasagar, Warangal, Horsely hills and Manjira Wildlife Sanctuary.

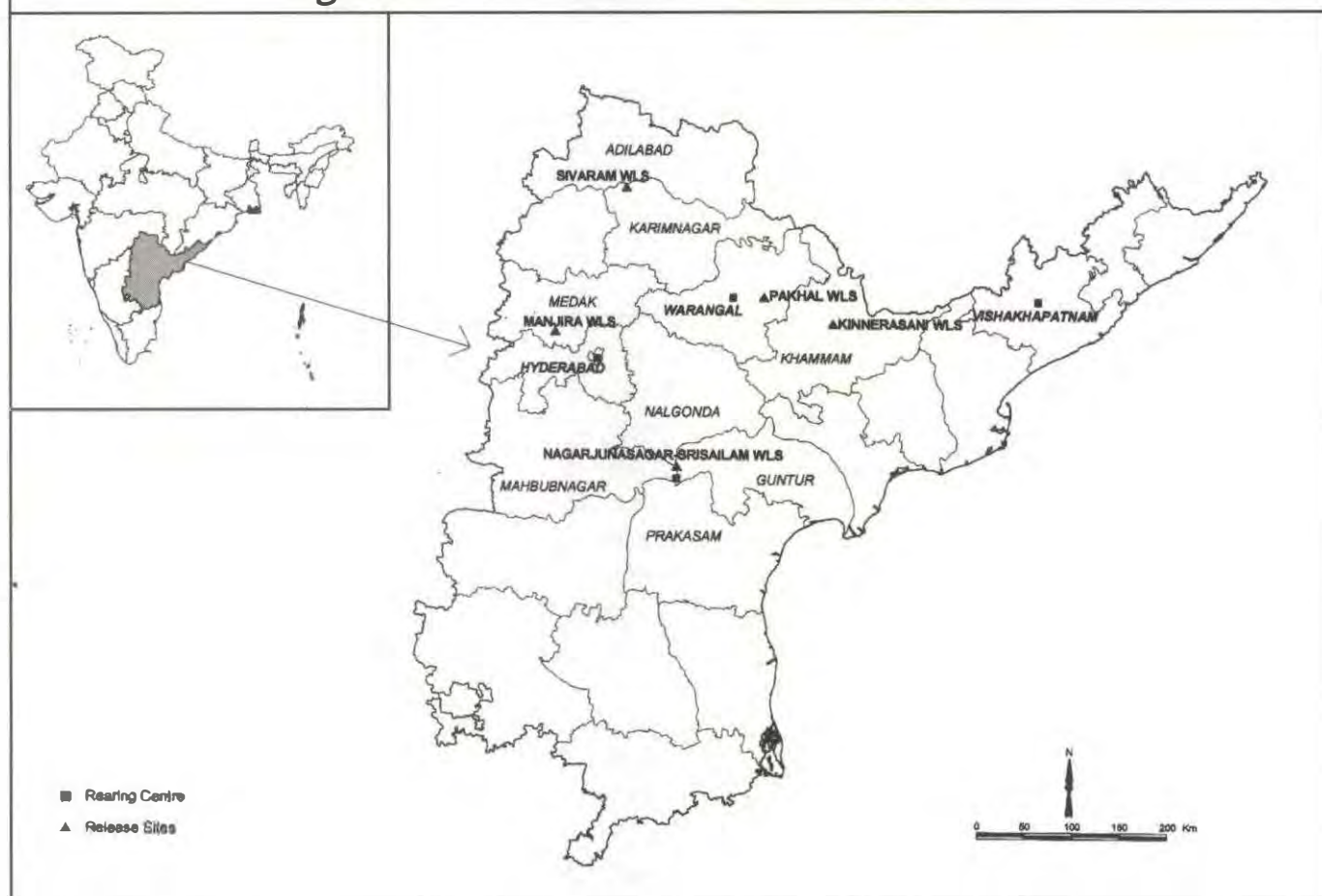
Since then over 1500 mugger crocodiles have been hatched and reared. For some time, the rearing centre at Hyderabad also catered to rearing gharial hatchlings obtained from Nepal and saltwater crocodiles obtained from Andaman & Nicobar Islands. However, the centre has now confined itself to breeding and rearing mugger crocodiles.

Currently, the state project has delinked its wild crocodile egg collection programme, and is involved in rearing crocodiles that breed in captivity at the Hyderabad, Vishakhapatnam, Nagarjunasagar and Warangal facilities. Together in all these facilities, the state holds more than 300 crocodilians belonging to the three species.

Crocodile reintroduction

Since the start of the Crocodile Conservation Project in Andhra Pradesh, over 320 mugger (Table 1) and saltwater crocodiles have been released back into the wild in Nagarjuna Sagar – Srisailem Tiger Reserve, Manjira Wildlife Sanctuary, Kinnerasani Wildlife

Figure 3- Crocodiles in Andhra Pradesh



Sanctuary, Siwaram Wildlife Sanctuary, Pakhal Wildlife Sanctuary and Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary. Mugger reintroductions total about 320 (Table 1).

1) Nagarjuna Sagar – Srisailem Sanctuary

As recommended by HR Bustard, Technical Advisor, FAO/UNDP, the Ethipothala Waterfalls (Chandravanka river, tributary of the Krishna river) area was selected and the first ever release of captive-reared mugger (1 male and 3 females) in Asia took place here on 8 February 1977. Subsequent releases (two individuals each) took place on 23 December 1978 and 16 September 1980 respectively. To give adequate

protection to this area, the Nagarjuna Sagar – Srisailem sanctuary was declared and notified in 1978. The sanctuary, now a Tiger Reserve. In April 1981, 128 mugger (2 males and 126 females) were released in Krishna river within the Tiger Reserve and further releases were made in March 1996 in Nagarjuna Sagar (3 male and 2 females). In May 1997, 28 males and 32 females and in September 1998, 17 males and 23 females were released in the Srisailem reservoir. Following the release, the first breeding of the mugger crocodiles in the wild was reported in 1981 at the Ethipothala Waterfalls (Chaudhury and Bustard, 1982).

Table 1
Showing the releases of mugger in Andhra Pradesh

Date of release	Total	Male	Female	Location
Feb. 1977	4	1	3	Ethipothala Falls, Nagarjunsagar - Srisaillam Sanctuary
Dec. 1978	2	-	2	-do-
Sept 1980.	2	2	-	-do-
April 1980	33	11	22	Kinnerasani WLS
Nov. 1980	15	5	10	Pakhal WLS
April 1981	128	2	126	Krishna river, Nagarjunsagar-Srisaillam Sanctuary
Jan. 1985	15			Siwaram WLS
Jan. 1985	10			Manjira WLS
May 1989	6	2	4	Manjira WLS
Mar. 1996	5	3	2	Nagarjuna Sagar Krishna River
May 1997	60	28	32	Krishna River Srisaillam
Sept. 1998	40	17	23	Srisaillam
Total	320			

II) Manjira Wildlife Sanctuary

The wild population of mugger in Manjira WLS was estimated to consists of 7 adults and 5 sub-adults in 1978 (BC Choudhury, unpublished data) where 10 juveniles were introduced in January 1985 and six more released in May 1989. There are reports of this released population breeding in wild since 1987 (Vijay Kumar, 1993).

III) Kinnerasani Wildlife Sanctuary

During the 1997 survey the reservoir on Kinnerasani river within Kinnerasani Reserve Forest in Khammam District was found suitable for crocodile release. It was declared a sanctuary in 1978 and in November 1980 a total of five males and 10 females were released in the reservoir. These mugger are also reported to be breeding in the wild since 1985 (BC Choudhury, 1995).