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Venezuela

TRANSLOCATION OF AMERICAN CROCODILES TO NORTHERN LAKE MARACAIBO BASIN, VENEZUELA: MINIMIZING CONFLICT BETWEEN PEOPLE AND CROCODILES. The American Crocodile (*Crocodylus acutus*) inhabits many areas of the Lake Maracaibo basin, although in isolated and depressed populations (Barros *et al.* 2005). Its geographic distribution in this large ecosystem comprises the entire lagoon, as well as all the rivers that flow into this vast system (eg Santa Ana, Santa Rosa, Negro, Limón, Palmar, Machango, Chama, Torondoy). Additionally, the American Crocodile is common in some dams, such as Pueblo Viejo and Machango in Zulia State, and in the vicinity of Isla de Toas, Zapara, stretch of San Carlos, Bahía del Tablazo and coastal system of the Refugio de Fauna Silvestre and Fishing Reserve “Ciénagas de los Olivitos” (RFSRP-CO) (Seijas 1986; Lander and Bermúdez 2008). In this last protected area, there is a resident population and a program for releasing individuals with the purpose of increasing the population (Lander *et al.* 1994; Velasco 1999).

The crocodiles released into this refuge come from national zoos and aquariums, conservation programs, and from private collections. Furthermore, some individuals from conflict situations, such as those removed from areas near urban, recreational, commercial and industrial areas, have been translocated. Since November 1996 a total of 214 individuals have been released into this reserve.

The relocation of several individuals in many cases has been preceded by public alarm, generated by frequent sighting

of individuals in very crowded places (eg city market, La Marina-Mirador recreational park, reparation boat company and regional petro-chemical installations). The alarm has resulted from over-reaction and misunderstanding, produced by malicious news that has been displayed through internet, radio, TV and locals newspapers. Here we present a current re-count of those individuals that have been moved for this last cause showing some captures and relocations. In all cases the specimens were released on an area of the RFSRP-CO (10° 57' 01.47" N, 71° 27' 08.96" W; La Palua Lagoon, see point Lib. on Figure 1). Table 1 shows data for 12 translocations, including biometric information. The authors participated in the capture, immobilization and translocations, along with firefighters, fishermen, employees of the industries affected by the presence of these crocodilians, ecologists, Venezuelan Ministry of Environment personnel, as well those associated with universities and the local zoo.

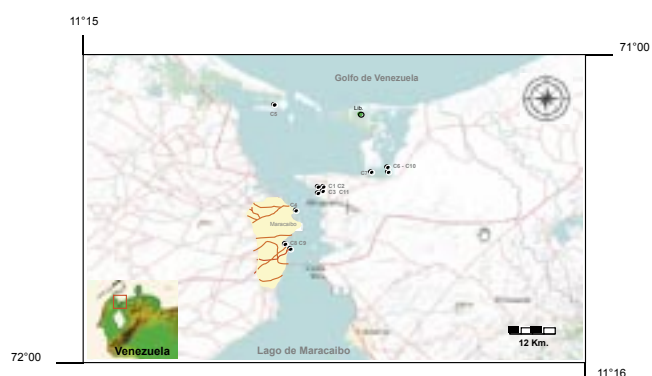


Figure 1. Locations at Lake Maracaibo basin where *C. acutus* were captured (C1-C11) and where they have been released (“Lib.”) within the RFSRP-CO, Zulia State, Venezuela.

The relocated specimens have been encountered from coastal regions to small water bodies, artificial channels, creeks and inlets. Many of these places are surrounded by patches of vegetation, mainly mangroves and have been strongly modified with respect to the shoreline and water quality (generally polluted). Some factors that could explain the presence of these individuals in those places could be: a) historical site fidelity, represented by the ecological and genetic ancestral habitats of the geographic distribution of this species in this area in the Lake Maracaibo basin; b) individuals were raised in captivity and later released by their keepers because of the difficulty of captive maintenance or possible escape; c) dispersing individuals that have left home searching for a more suitable environment including access to food, space, breeding, or other factors.

We are sure that the strategy of translocation will continue in the future, however it requires the identification of new locations to introduce these individuals to ensure their long-term survival. It is important to consider marking all individuals and possibly establishing a tracking system (eg satellite tracking) in order to learn more about the biology and movements that these animals engage in after to being released.

Table 1. Details of *C. acutus* relocated to Lake Maracaibo. IPT= Instalaciones de la Petroquímica el Tablazo, Municipio Miranda, Zulia; SAA= Salinas artesanales Del Ancón, Municipio Miranda; AO = Astillero Omica, cerca de la Terminal de Buses, Municipio Maracaibo; EP= Empresa Produsal, Ancón de Iturre, Municipio Miranda, Zulia; IT= Isla de Toas, Municipio Almirante Padilla, Zulia; PRM= Parque Recreacional Marina norte, Milagro, Municipio Maracaibo. Specimens C1, C2, C3 and C11 were found in diverse channels, generally artificial and inside the IPT.

No.	Date of Capture	Capture Location	Sex	TL (m)	BWt (kg)
C1	Feb 2002	IPT	F	2.58	-
C2	6 Feb 2003	IPT	F	2.80	95
C3	27 Oct 2003	IPT	F	2.82	92
C4	17 Sep 2005	PRM	M	2.87	88
C5	1 Jun 2006	IT	M	0.82	3
C6	16 Jun 2006	SAA	M	0.70	2.8
C7	6 Dec 2006	EP	?	0.45	0.4
C8	26 Aug 2007	AO	M	2.6	75
C9	8 Mar 2009	AO	M	2.27	52
C10	25 Aug 2009	SAA	M	1.44	10.2
C11	9 Oct 2009	IPT	F	3.15	170
C12	3 Nov 2010	IPT	M	3.20	160

Notes: C4 (Fig. 2) - locals called newspapers and named it as “Juancho”. Curiously, local people used the same name for later specimens (C8, C9). “Juancho” alludes to the old cartoon crocodile “Wally Gator”, which was translated as “Lagarto Juancho” on Venezuelan TV during the 1970s and 1980s.



Figure 2. “Juancho” (C4; Table 1) was temporally transported to an enclosure in “Vereda del Lago” Park prior to its release.



Figure 3. American crocodile (C9; see Table 1) being released at the RFSRP-CO.

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Costa Rica

WORLD-FAMOUS CROCODILE “POCHO” DIES. Pocho, the Costa Rican American crocodile (*Crocodylus acutus*) that gained international media attention for a weekly show he performed with owner Gilberto Sheedan (54), died in October 2011, in the town of Siquirres. The crocodile is believed to have died from natural causes.

Every Sunday, Pocho and “Chito” as Sheedan was better known, performed a show for visitors in a 100 m² artificial lake at Finca Las Tilapias. Chito could command Pocho to do tricks such as winking its one good eye, lifting its head and tail out of the water, rolling over and permitting Chito to stick his head inside the massive reptile’s mouth.