

Project Update: October 2017

Summary

The vulnerable dwarf crocodile (*Osteolaemus tetraspis*) remains the least studied of West Africa's three crocodilian species. On this RSG-funded project, we contributed data on its population and distribution at the southern Ghana's KNUST Wewe River and tributaries. We documented five individuals through field surveys and citizen science. We also launched the Dwarf Crocs Awareness Campaign, involving university students and local community members.

The Dwarf Crocodile Population Status and Distribution Surveys

A team of two crocodile experts and three undergraduate students have been conducting periodic surveys along Wewe River and its tributaries. In late June 2017, we captured a sub-juvenile individual at the Ahensan-Wewe tributary (Fig.1). Local and foreign citizen scientists we interviewed also provided evidence of five other records in recent times. Michael G. Starkey (SAVE THE FROGS!) made two observations at the same locality in 2013 and 2016 respectively. This year, construction workers incidentally killed a dwarf crocodile, which became "feast" for them. Also, this same year, university workers rescued another adult individual from local inhabitants and took it to the Kumasi Zoo. Unfortunately, it died later as it was badly injured from harassments by the local inhabitants.



Fig. 1: The recorded Dwarf Crocodile at the Ahensan-Wewe tributary

Threats to the Dwarf Crocodile

Alongside field surveys, we documented farm expansions and hunting for food to be the most persistent threats to the dwarf crocodile. However, new threats that we recorded included the incidental killing from construction activities within the riparian buffer zone of the Wewe River and its catchment areas.

Capacity Building

We have involved three undergraduate students of KNUST as research assistants to build their capacities in crocodile research and conservation. We tutored them on the general biology, ecology, and behavior of crocodiles. We also trained them on safety protocols when conducting crocodile research including wearing of appropriate protective gears such as rubber boots. We also took them through standardised methods for surveying and catching crocodiles that ensure minimum stress to the species and its habitats (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2: Project leader (centre) with some student trainees

Community Engagement

We conducted one-on-one campaigns, educating local people including farmers and construction workers operating along the Wewe River to avoid conducting their activities within 30 m of the riparian buffer zone as enshrined in the laws of Ghana. This suggestion will also feature in the Wewe Catchment Dwarf Crocodile Conservation Action Plan which we will draft together with university authorities and community leaders.

Appendix

Source of record	No. records	Location of record
RSG Project team	1	Freshwater pool at the Wewe-Ahensan tributary
Construction worker	1	Behind KNUST Brunei Hostel
Michael Starkey of SAVE THE FROGS!	2	Freshwater pool at the Wewe-Ahensan tributary
Local inhabitants	1	Along main Wewe River

