



CROCODILE

CROCODILE (*nahang*, Baluchi *gandū*), *Crocodylus palustris*, the marsh crocodile (Figure 1). The marsh crocodile has been little studied in Persia and did not enter the zoological literature until 1971 (Honegger). Amān-Allāh Jahānbānī (p. 133) has made reference to the existence of crocodiles in Baluchestan, but the only recorded scientific observations of crocodiles in Persia are those of Wayne Kinunen and Steve Bullock and Marc Bosch and his colleagues (in unpublished reports made to the Iran Division of Research and Development) in 1970 and of the present author in 1979 (pp. 520-23).

The species is distributed from Assam west through most of India and Sri Lanka and intermittently through Baluchistan to extreme southeastern Persia, where it is known only from the Sarbāz river, the drainage just west of the Dašt river of Pakistan. The Persian crocodile population is presumed to belong to the widely distributed subspecies *Crocodylus palustris palustris* Lesson (Anderson, p. 522). In 1350 Š./1971 the Persian Department of the environment (Sāzmān-e ḥefāẓ-e moḥīṭ-e zīst) established in Baluchistan-Sīstān province the Bāhū Kalāt protected region for this endangered species (Firouz, p. 35). This reserve encompassed 394,750 ha of mountains, foothills, and plains and included much of the length of the Sarbāz river. The crocodile was then a fully protected species under Persian law. Nonetheless, it faces a double threat from poaching for hides and destruction of the habitat. Enforcement of protective legislation along the Sarbāz is difficult to impossible, and without constant patrolling of the banks on horseback it is doubtful that any hide poacher will ever be apprehended. Furthermore, construction of roads and bridges in the



area probably poses a threat to the animals, especially if further development results in greater demand for the river waters for irrigation and domestic use.

Although crocodiles up to 4 m long have been recorded in India, the largest specimens observed by biologists in Persia have been estimated at no more than 2 m, perhaps an indication that hunting has eliminated the older, mature crocodiles. This species rarely, if ever, attacks human beings; apparently villagers do not fear them in Baluchistan, where many other, harmless animals are feared, and children bathe in pools claimed to be inhabited by crocodiles. Nor, as far as the author could determine, are the animals considered a hazard to domestic stock.

Although little is known of the natural history of crocodiles in Persia, it is likely that their food items include cyprinid fishes, mudskippers, frogs, water birds, and small mammals that visit pools in the river to drink. Young crocodiles are probably preyed upon by the larger mammalian and avian predators and possibly also by adult crocodiles. Desert monitor lizards (*Varanus griseus*), foxes, mongooses, and domestic dogs may take the eggs. For adult crocodiles man is the only predator.

The marsh crocodile inhabits fresh-water marshes, pools, and rivers, and probably the only suitable crocodile habitat in Persian Baluchistan is along the Sarbāz river. The present intermittent distribution of this species in Pakistan and Persian Baluchistan represents a fragmentation of a once more continuous range during moister climatic regimes in the recent past.

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