

Status of Crocodile Population in Lawas-Sundar Coastal Area

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Abstract

The eight-night spotlight surveys conducted along Sg. Lawas, Merapok, Kuku, Sangkarum and Punang from 29 September until 6 October 2004 did not seem to be long enough to establish the actual population and ecological status of crocodiles (*Crocodylus porosus*) in the Lawas-Sundar coastal area. Though the Relative Density of the species was very low (0.16 ind./km and 1.34 ind./km after taking the CF into account), far below than that reported for most of unexploited rivers (4 – 12 ind./km), and even nil in most of the rivers surveyed, repeated surveys in different season and difference tidal conditions are required to confirm the actual status of the animal. Lacking in Type I habitat and high rate of mortality among hatchlings, is probably a valid explanation on the scarcity of the species in the area at this point of time. Report by local people on possible contamination of Sg. Lawas from sludge drained out from oil palm plantation nearby and rejected chemical-treated timbers thrown into the river from the log ponds and sawmills along the rivers are yet to be verified. However this impact may not be significant as various reports in the past have not mentioned that pollutants are major factor causing high mortality rate in the crocodilians. In the meantime human intervention in managing the existing small population of crocodiles in the area is not urgently required and should be left as it is whilst repeated surveys within a year period are to be continued.