

Salt-water Crocodile Status

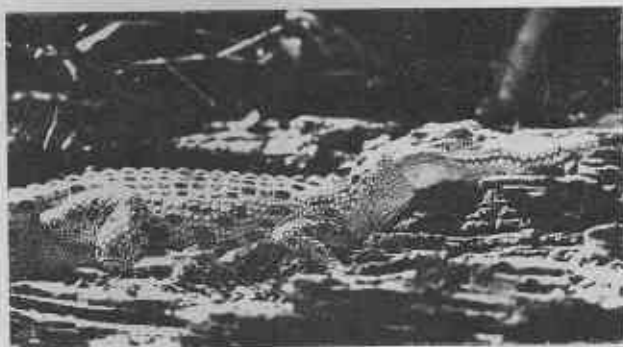
A July 1978 survey of Salt-water Crocodiles in the Kimberley has confirmed that the species remain greatly depleted following the hunting for skins which took place in the 50's and 60's.

Officers of the Western Australian Wildlife Research Centre spent two weeks in the Kimberley working with the University of Sydney's Crocodile Research Unit headed by Professor Harry Messel. They surveyed three river systems—the Glenelg, the Prince Regent and the Ord. Two hundred and thirteen Crocodiles were sighted in the Gleneg, 189 in the Prince Regent and 179 in the Ord. One hundred and forty-three of these were hatchlings which, because of their high mortality, should not be considered in any assessment of viable Crocodile populations.

The team has now surveyed all major river systems between Derby and Kalumburu except those in the Walcott Inlet area. Only those rivers running into the west arm of Cambridge Gulf remain to be surveyed in the East Kimberley. The total number of non-hatchling Crocodiles in the rivers counted so far is estimated to be about 1 000 and the total non-hatchling crocodile population in Western Australia is believed not to exceed 2 000. Only a maximum of 15 per cent to 20 per cent of these, or about 350 animals, are breeding adults.

The surveys have revealed that breeding habitat is very scarce in the Kimberley and consequently the potential for the recovery of the Salt-water Crocodile population is not good. If it does recover it will take many decades.

Even though Western Australia was the first State in Australia to protect the Salt-water Crocodile scientists can not now be sure that the species will recover. Continued monitoring will be necessary to ensure that the species does not continue to decline.



Salt-water Crocodile—(*Crocodylus Porosus*)