

CROCODILE SURVEY

Dr. H.R. Bustard, of the Research School of Biological Sciences, Australian National University, Canberra, undertook a survey of the saltwater crocodile (Crocodylus porosus) in the northern waters of Western Australia. The survey was of an exploratory nature to provide a situation report on this commercially exploited species.

During the period of the survey from September 22 to October 6, Dr. Bustard, together with an assistant and Mr. G. Hanley, the Department's Warden stationed at Wyndham, visited Cambridge Gulf, Admiralty Gulf, Vansittart Bay and Napier Broome Bay. Use was made of a charter boat to visit these areas as well as other estuary areas en route. Some time was also spent surveying suitable crocodile habitat by four wheel drive vehicle.

The World Wildlife Fund readily agreed to meet 50% of the cost of this initial survey by matching the Department's contribution of \$2,000. This survey will probably be followed up by another visit to the areas at a different time of the year to eliminate any seasonal factors that may affect it.

In an article entitled "The future of Australasian crocodiles" published in Wildlife, Dr. Bustard listed a number of important aims with regard to the conservation of the saltwater crocodile. These were:-

1. Prevent its extinction as a member of the Australian fauna.
2. Restore its status to a level where it can be seen readily in the far north of Australia.
3. Permit scientifically managed exploitation of the resource - when it is adequately restored, and at a level where a profitable industry can be sustained.
4. Set aside areas as "sanctuaries" in which continued total protection is assured.

Since the above aims in themselves will lead to controversy, it is important that scientific data is available on which to base specific recommendations. Hence the importance of such a survey and of such an ecological investigation into

such a heavily exploited species, commercially, as the saltwater crocodile is very apparent.

The Queensland Minister for Primary Industries, Mr. J.A. Row, M.L.A., who is responsible for fauna conservation in that State, recently advised the Western Australian Minister, Mr. G.C. MacKinnon, M.L.C., that Queensland will co-operate with Western Australia in the efforts to conserve our crocodiles. At present their Fauna Conservation Act covers birds and mammals only. Mr. Row has indicated that he is prepared to seek an amendment to the Act to provide supervision over the control of the taking of crocodiles.
