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"50th Anniversary Celebration of Crocodile Conservation Project in Odisha"
Odisha is a top-notch guide for the conservation of crocodiles: Forest Minister
Odisha's unique and glorious journey in the field of crocodile conservation: ACS Sri Sahu

Bhubaneswar: 17/06/2025

Today is June 17. International Crocodile Day. The '50th Anniversary Celebration of Crocodile Conservation Project in Odisha' was celebrated today under the aegis of State Wildlife Headquarters, Forest, Environment and Climate Change Department at the premises of Odisha Agriculture and Technological University.

In a video message, Minister of Forest, Environment and Climate Change, Shri Ganeshram Singkhuntia said that Odisha is an important habitat for all the crocodile species found in India –Saltwater crocodile (Baula), mugger and Gharials. For the past 50 years, our state has been setting an example for the whole world in the conservation of crocodiles. Crocodiles have a special role to play in a healthy wetland. Being an integral part of the food chain, crocodiles play a vital role in maintaining natural biodiversity by removing dead organisms from rivers, lakes and other water bodies, creating a healthy environment. As an eco-tourism destination, it helps in earning livelihood for the local people in direct and indirect ways. Crocodile conservation is not just about saving a single creature, it is a symbol of preserving our rivers, water bodies and the entire ecosystem. Our government, under the leadership of Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri Mohan Charan Majhi, is always committed to the protection of water, forests and wildlife. We must take a pledge to take forward the great work started by our ancestors towards nature and environment protection and turn it into a mass movement. He expressed that the challenge of today is to make the crocodile conservation project in the state as successful as possible by maintaining the ecological balance of the wetlands.

Additional Chief Secretary Forest, Environment and Climate Change Shri Satyabrat Sahu, who attended the ceremony as the chief guest, said that today we are not just celebrating an ordinary event, but we are celebrating 50 years of a unique and glorious journey of Odisha in the field of nature (crocodile) conservation. Crocodiles play a very important role in maintaining the ecological balance of our rivers, lakes and mangroves etc. Therefore, their conservation is not only for the environment but also closely linked to our cultural pride and human values. Odisha is the only state in the whole of India, where all the three species of crocodiles are found in their natural habitat. We should feel proud of that. But fifty years ago, these three species of crocodiles living in the rivers, lakes and reservoirs of our state were on the verge of extinction. Their number was limited to a handful. In that critical situation, in 1975, this ambitious project was launched in Odisha with the joint support of the Government of India and the United Nations. Odisha's role in the success of this project has become an example for the whole world today. From 96 baula crocodiles in Bhitarkanika mangrove, their number has increased to 1880. Due to natural reproduction of the Ghadial crocodile at Satkoshia Gorge in Tikarpada of the Mahanadi, its number has increased to 16. Local residents have been engaged as 'Crocodile Friends' to protect these. Along with this, a reward of Rs. 1000 has been announced for the safe return of the crocodile cubs that fell into the fishermen's nets. The mugger crocodile, which lives in freshwater, was on the verge of extinction due to loss of prey and habitat. In 1975, the state government started a crocodile conservation project at Ramteerth in Shimlipal with the help of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Today, due to successful breeding efforts, the number of crocodiles in Odisha has increased significantly and it is a matter of pride and honour for the state that more than 200 mugger crocodiles were recorded in the crocodile census this year. ACS Shri Sahu gave credit to our scientists who guided this project with knowledge and research, every officer and employee of the forest department who worked day and night to protect these creatures, risking their lives, and our local brothers and sisters living on the banks of the wetlands, without whose cooperation, dedication and traditional knowledge this success would not have been possible.

Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and Chief of Forest Force Shri Suresh Panth joined as the guest of honour and said that recently the increase in the number of crocodiles has created a new challenge in the state. Due to shrinking of their habitat and loss of spawning grounds, man-crocodile conflict has increased. It

has become necessary today to work like a vigilant guard towards crocodile protection. To prevent human-crocodile conflict, enclosures and safe bathing places on the river banks, etc. have been built. In addition, compassionate assistance is being provided to the victims of human-crocodile conflict. However, widespread public awareness is needed in this direction. He called on everyone to continue their selfless efforts to continuously maintain the commitment to crocodile conservation.

The Vice Chancellor of Odisha University of Agriculture and Technology, Shri Pravat Kumar Raul proposed to set up an academic centre for wildlife research and conservation in the premises of OUAT.

Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and Chief Wildlife Warden Shri Prem Kumar Jha delivered the welcome address and termed the success of 50th anniversary of crocodile project in Odisha as a glorious chapter in the history of Indian wildlife conservation.

ACS Shri Sahu formally launched a documentary film on 'Crocodile Conservation in Odisha'. A book on Gharials, a brochure on 50 years of crocodile conservation and the book 'Species Recovery of Gharial in river Mahanadi – Interim Report' were inaugurated by the Chief Guest. He had earlier visited a photo exhibition on 50 years of crocodile conservation. Renowned crocodile expert Dr. Lala Ashwini Kumar Singh was honoured for Gharial crocodile, Dr. Sudhakar Kar for Saltwater crocodile and Professor Dr. Sudarshan Maharana was honoured for his lifelong dedication and contribution to Gharial conservation. The winners of the drawing, photography and debate competitions held earlier among students of various high schools and colleges under the crocodile range divisions were awarded.

Chief Conservator of Forests and Director of Nandankanan Dr. Manoj V. Nayar gave the vote of thanks.

It is worth noting that a national level workshop on crocodiles will be organised in Bhubaneswar on 18th June 2025, where many crocodile experts, scientists, researchers from various national organisations and NGOs, senior forest officers of Odisha and forest officers from other states will participate. A week-long crocodile conservation and awareness programme will be organised in all crocodile range divisions including five major (Mangrove FD, Satkoshia WL, Similipal North and South, Berhampur FD), nine others and Nandankanan from 17th to 25th June 2025. Crocodile conservation awareness will be spread through various awareness programmes like mobile van, cycle rally and wall painting etc. in the five major crocodile divisions.



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