

Supporting the conservation of the Orinoco Crocodile (*Crocodylus intermedius*) in the Eastern Llanos of Colombia





JANUARY 2014

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Hatchling of Ofinoco Crocodile. Cravo Norte (Arauca) Chelonia / Mario Garcés						
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Colombia Colombia Spain & Spain

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The Orinoco crocodile (*Crocodylus intermedius*) is a true crocodile (Family Crocodylidae) and not an alligator (Family Alligatoridae), such as the Spectacled caiman (*Caiman crocodilus*), the Black caiman (*Melanosuchus niger*) or the species of the genus *Paleosuchus*.

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FEBRUARY 2014

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Hatchlings of Orinoco Crocodile. EBT "Roberto Franco" (Villavicencio - Meta)

©/Chelonia / Manuel Merchán

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Colombia Colombia Spain & Spain

The Orinoco crocodile is the only crocodile species whose distribution is restricted to a single river basin, the Orinoco Basin, which is geographically shared by both Colombia and Venezuela. Within the river basin are located the rivers and water bodies of the Orinoco Llanos eco-region, which cover the departments of Arauca, Casanare, Meta and Vichada in Colombia.





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Adult Orinoco Crocodile. Ecoparque Wisirare (Orocué - Casanare) © Chelonia / Miguel Cárdenas

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Colombia Spain & Spain The Orinoco crocodile is considered to be one of the world's most threatened vertebrates, and is considered to be **Critically Endangered** (CR) by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the governments of both Colombia and Venezuela.





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Orinoco Crocodile (estimated total len	ght 240 cm). Vichada Riv	er (Vichada)

Chelonia / Fernando Gómez

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It is estimated that there are only about 1,700 Orinoco crocodiles in the wild inhabiting the different rivers, canals, lakes and reservoirs of the Orinoco Llanos; less than 200 individuals in Colombia and more than 1,500 in Venezuela.

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Colombia Colombia Spain & Spain

In the first half of the twentieth century, an estimated two to four million *C. intermedius* were hunted, more intensively between 1929 and 1934, for the international skin trade. This uncontrolled and disproportionate exploitation rapidly reduced the species´ populations and brought it to the brink of extinction.

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In Colombia there are four relict populations: 1. The Cravo Norte-Ele-Lipa-Cuiloto (Arauca) river system 2. The Duda and Guayabero rivers (Meta department.) 3. The middle and lower courses of the Vichada River (Vichada Department) 4. The middle course of the Meta River (near the confluence of the Arauca, Casanare and Vichada departments).

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Newborns of Orinoco Crocodile. Cravo Norte	(Arauca)

Newborns of Orinoco Crocodile. Cravo Norte (Arauca)

© Chelonia / Mario Garcés

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Colombia Colombia Spain & Spain

The biggest Orinoco crocodile population in Colombia is found in the department of Arauca, with at least 50 individuals and 9 reproductive events in 2012. In addition to the four relict populations, there is evidence that in other areas and rivers of the Colombian Llanos, there are a small number of more or less isolated individuals (Guarrojo River, Bita River, Orinoco River, lower courses of the Meta River, among others).





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> Adult Orinoco crocodile males could reach in the past up to 7 meters, and females can reach up to about 3.50 meters. These usually lay between 20 and 70 eggs in nests they dig on beaches or sandbars along rivers and streams. Both females and males can reach ages of over 60 years old.

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Pozo Caimán. Meander of the Vichada River (Vichada) © Chelonia / Fernando Gómez

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<u>Holidays</u>

Colombia Colombia Spain & Spain

Females lay their eggs between December and February, when river and stream water levels are low. The eggs remain buried between 80 and 120 days. Orinoco crocodile hatchlings are born between March and May, measuring between 25-30 centimeters. Females can remain vigilant whilst in the water, still staying close to the nest and they can help the young out of the nest into the water by transporting them in their mouths.





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Colombia Colombia Spain & Spain

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Burrowing adult crocodiles feed primarily on fish, but can also hunt birds, other reptiles and mammals. The hatchlings are usually kept close to the vegetated river banks and feed mainly on insects, amphibians and crustaceans. The mother may stay close to them for up to two months after their hatching.





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> The Orinoco crocodile serves several important functions within the Llanos ecosystems, helping to regulate the carnivorous fish populations (it feeds on), providing nutrients to the water (droppings), preventing the clogging of wells and pipes (through their movements) and maintaining a balance within the trophic or food web.

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The collection of eggs for consumption and of hatchlings to own or sell as pets, the destruction or deterioration of habitat, the deliberate or accidental death of individuals, the changes in climate and the natural dynamics of rivers (which can cause flooding of their nesting areas and consequently egg loss) seem to negatively influence the recovery of Orinoco crocodile populations.

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Supporting the conservation of the Orinoco Crocodile (*Crocodylus intermedius*) in the Eastern Llanos of Colombia