

## Live Gharials helping investigate Mass Gharial Deaths on river Chambal

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In 2007, the Indian Gharial became the only crocodile to be re-classified "Critically Endangered" by the World Conservation Union (IUCN). The latest IUCN Red List puts the number of breeding adult Gharials in Nepal and India at under 200.

The past two months have seen the unprecedented and shocking death of the Gharials on the Chambal River, while other animals such as marsh (mugger) crocodiles and turtles appear unaffected. The National Chambal Sanctuary is spread across Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh and protects a 425 km stretch of the Chambal River. The mortalities have been confined to a 70 km stretch of the Lower Chambal from Etawah to Gwalior. The epicenter of this disaster is near Etawah (Uttar Pradesh), at the confluence of the Yamuna and Chambal rivers.

Post mortem analysis of dead Gharials found ulcerated lesions in the stomach and some inflammation in the intestine. Absence of external injuries rules out accidental death or poaching. Toxicological and pathological examination of the organs of the dead gharials by the IVRI, Bareilly, and ITRC, Lucknow found lead concentrations between 0.7-1.4 ppm. Liver and kidney tissues indicate degenerative changes. Presence of various stages of protozoan parasite was also detected. Autopsies conducted on 4 dead gharials on 27th January, 2008 revealed significant gout - both visceral and articulate. Even the feet and tail joints had uric acid deposits. Gout is indicative of kidney failure as a result of toxic poisoning or disease. However, the gharials seemed in good health condition with fat deposits.

The Min of Environment & Forests, Govt of India set up a 14-member Gharial Crisis Management Group (CMG) consisting of U.P, M.P and Rajasthan forest departments, along with representatives from IVRI (Indian Veterinary Research Institute), ITRC-Lucknow, WII (Wildlife Institute of India) and NGOs like GCA, WWF and Wildlife S.O.S. The CMG had also decided in meetings that regular patrolling of the river shall be done to identify affected animals and if needed live animals would be rescued / captured and treated / observed and samples collected and analysed in the interest of saving the species.

Gharials matching the size and the age of those which had died earlier were captured using three

boats and soft nets with minimal stress to the animal in Ajab Singh Kheda stretch of the Chambal River. Upon capture, the animal's eyes were immediately covered to keep the animal calm. A team of experts from GCA, Wildlife S.O.S and WWF along with International Crocodile reptile vets from Hong Kong, South Africa, USA and France conducted detailed veterinary examinations of the captured gharials. GPS locations of each Gharial were noted down and the animals were micro-chipped for future identification.

The team of international crocodile experts includes Dr. Fritz Huchzermeyer (Vice-Chairman of the IUCN-Croc Specialist Group's Veterinary advisory group), Dr. Paolo Martelli (Ocean Parks, Hong Kong), Dr. Brian Stacy (a pathologist from the University of Florida) and Dr. Samuel Martin (Director of La Ferme Aux Crocodiles, France). Other members of the Team were Dr. G. Sudhakar, IFS (DCF-National Chambal Sanctuary Project), Dr. Jitendra Kumar-MP Forest Department, Dr. Kajal Kumar Jadav-Wildlife S.O.S Veterinary Officer, Dr. Anirudh Belsare, Mr. Dohre-Wildlife Warden-Etawah, Shailendra Singh (Madras Crocodile Bank Trust). During the course of patrolling, the forest staff noticed 3 affected animals showing visible symptoms of sickness. These animals were promptly rescued and taken ashore for medical treatment and observation. When they died, detailed post mortems were conducted.

"The death of the gharials is a matter of great concern for the Uttar Pradesh Forest Department. We have conducted post mortems of dead gharials and the analysis of samples from live gharials will give us parameters to compare results of the post mortems with." said **Mr. D.N.S Suman, IFS, Chief Wildlife Warden, Uttar Pradesh.**

Romulus Whitaker, Managing Trustee - MCBT and Chairman, GCA said, "This joint operation marks a significant step forward in ascertaining the causes behind the Gharial deaths and ensuring the survival of this Critically Endangered species."

"Not only do we hope to get to the bottom of the Gharial deaths, we are also creating a database on the Indian Gharial which will be crucial for the long term conservation of the species in its natural habitat," said **Kartick Satyanarayan, Co-founder, Wildlife S.O.S.**

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**Wildlife S.O.S** is an Indian Non-Governmental organisation working in the field of Wildlife rescue and Rehabilitation since 1995. Our main project is the rescue and rehabilitation of 'dancing bears', which are Indian Sloth Bears exploited by a gypsy tribe, called Kalandars for street entertainment purposes. In collaboration with the State Forest Departments, Wildlife S.O.S runs the World's largest Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre for Sloth Bears in Agra alongwith 3 other centres in Bhopal, Bangalore and Hyderabad. Working in tandem with the government law enforcement agencies, including state forest departments, Wildlife S.O.S has rescued around 400 Sloth bears from leading miserable lives with Kalandars and with the recent extension to the Agra Bear Rescue Facility, we hope to eradicate the profession of 'bear dancing' by rescuing the remaining around 500 bears off the Indian streets and rehabilitating the bear dancers as well, so that they and their generations to come don't revert to 'dancing or poaching bears' ever again. Join hands with us in giving both man and animal a life of Dignity and Freedom!!! The Bear Rescue & Kalendar Rehabilitation Programs of Wildlife S.O.S are primarily funded by International Animal Rescue. Other international partners are Free the Bears Fund Inc - Australia, Humane Society International-Australia and One Voice Association, France.

For more, visit our website, [www.wildlifesos.org](http://www.wildlifesos.org)

**For more information, Please contact:**

**Vasudha Mehta**

Education and Communication Officer - Wildlife S.O.S

You can also visit [www.wildlifesos.org](http://www.wildlifesos.org) for more information.