

## “Children Crocodile Festival” promoting wildlife conservation education through games in Charotar Region, Gujarat, India

For over a decade, the non-profit Voluntary Nature Conservancy (VNC-India) has worked to conserve crocodiles and reduce human-crocodile conflicts in Gujarat. VNC has equally focused on research and education. Throughout the Charotar region, we have been conducting awareness campaigns and programs to educate the local community about the conservation value of the crocodile and the precautions to be taken when living near crocodile-occupied areas. We have been using different mediums, from distributing awareness materials, audio-video mediums, Power Point presentations and documentary screenings to create awareness. We were searching for a more effective method of raising awareness and educating people than the traditional methods. We discovered that games could be a more creative and effective way of teaching them about crocodiles. That is how VNC created the “Children Crocodile Festival” awareness campaign. VNC believes that



Dr. Raju Vyas addressed the young school children about the event, the crocodile and its conservation importance. © Pruthviraj Patel.



Participants making crocodiles out of mud; students during the event at Petli, Gujarat. © Vishal Mistry.

environmental education can be transformed from dusty textbooks into interactive games, and that well-designed games can be invaluable teaching tools.

Children Crocodile Festival is a full-day event for children from

government schools, including educational programmes, competitions, and games. Among other things, students learned about crocodile ecology, conservation issues, monitoring techniques, and ways of being safe around a crocodile area. Children



Participants actively engaged in drawing competitions during the event. © Vishal Mistry.

Crocodile Festival 2022 was held on 01 September 2022, at Petli Village and was sponsored by the village’s Sarpanch (Village Head), Ms. Bhumi Trivedi, and her husband, Manoj Trivedi. Around 20 participants aged between 11–13 were invited to participate in the event’s various activities from 15 schools in villages such as Dabhau, Laval, Heranj, Deva, Navagam, Vaso, Malataj, Tranja, Petli, Demol Roon, Alindra, and Traj. Nearly 350 students gathered at Petli Village Primary School to mark the occasion. The event’s theme was “My Village, My Crocodiles”.

The event started with the inaugural session by Dr. Raju Vyas, Joint-Vice Chair, IUCN-CSG South Asia & Iran, who gave a brief introduction

about Crocodiles and their conservation aspects. The activities began with elocution and drawing competitions. Participants were asked to create the drawing based on their observations. The same went for the “Crocodile Making” competitions.

Moreover, their work shows how closely they have been observing crocodiles in their

crocodiles. Their observation showed, about crocodile basking area, the food they eat and the space they share, the fisherman interacting with crocodiles etc. These competitions were followed by various games and concluded with prize distribution in various categories. At the end of the session, volunteers overseeing the game discussed the concepts of crocodile ecology and conservation specific to the game.

Following these competitions were games such as “Crocodile’s Eggs,” “Crocodile Walk,” “Crocodile Burrow,” and “My Friend Crocodile, and other nature conservation games.” These games were modified slightly from the traditional version to incorporate crocodile ecology, biology, and conservation aspects. For example, in



Children playing the “Crocodile’s Egg” game during the event at Petli, Gujarat. © Pruthviraj Patel.



Children played “My Friend Crocodile”, modified from the game “Snakes and Ladders”, during the event. © Vishal Mistry.



Volunteers of Voluntary Nature Conservancy at the Children Crocodile Festival 2022, Petli Village, Gujarat. © Pruthviraj Patel.

the game “Crocodile Eggs”, players learn about the fact that female crocodiles can be protective and thus aggressive during the nesting season and precautions must be taken to avoid any conflict situation. “Crocodile Walk” teaches children about the habitat and physiology of crocodiles, their basking behaviour, and their food habitat. Games like “Crocodile Burrow” teach them about nesting ecology. There is also a “My Friend Crocodiles” version of Snakes and Ladders that teaches about responsible

behaviour when living near a crocodile area. Winners got their prizes accordingly, in terms of certificates, writing pads, school bags, and water bottles. Moreover, all the participants were given a geometry box, as a token gift, for their participation and efforts. During this event, children learned to appreciate the presence of crocodiles right alongside them next to human settlements, which gave them an understanding of wildlife living harmoniously in a human-dominated world.

In the future, we hope to expand this program to include more than 500 students each year, allowing conservation education to reach a larger audience in a larger region.

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