

## Global WarNing! Global WarMing and other scary happenings

Global *warMing* is just one of the many *warNings* to which we are exposed at least on a daily basis and sometimes on an hourly basis today. Aside from the more human-generated dangers which face even the common man, such as fall-out from various political activities, increasing street crimes, etc., we are confronted with a series of emerging diseases -- bird flu, chicken virus, AIDS, SARS, Chitrid virus (which is wiping out whole populations of amphibians), etc. - also have a basis in human activities of importing or exporting materiel, living or dead, from drugs to live human beings, throughout the length and breadth and of the earth.

Earlier when the first news of the global amphibian crisis as a result of chitrid fungus virus came out we consulted an international expert who opined that chitrid may not be as much of a problem in India since the virus loves cool streams and climates. More recently, chitrid virus has been discovered in localities which were once considered not much of a risk. Although chitrid has not been identified in South Asia, that doesn't justify a sigh of relief. The fact of the matter is that no surveys or studies have been done for the virus in this entire region. We don't have it because we have no way of knowing if we did have it! Not a good way to cope!

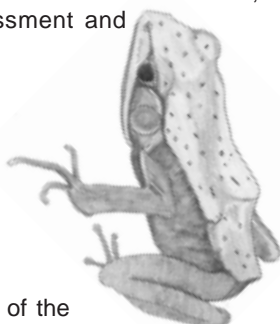
Therefore this and the next issues of ZOOS' PRINT will attempt to focus more on the various forms of impending crises, local regional and global such as the Amphibian Crisis, recent Gharial population crash, Global Warming, etc. and how various local, regional and global organisations and associations are trying to do their share of protecting what's left of the earth and its organisms.

### Helping Herptiles

Zoo Outreach Organisation has been running an *ad hoc* education campaign funded by Chester Zoo, United Kingdom, called "Helping Herptiles" which includes the two major groups of amphibians and reptiles which are featured in ZOO's networks SARN South Asian Reptile Network and Amphibian Network of South Asia ANSA, which have been running now for 11 years, conducting training and species assessment workshops, taking in network members, producing newsletter and distributing occasional publications of interest to the overall herptile community in this region.

With regard to reptiles, SARN (collaborating with CBSG, South Asia, ZOO and WILD) has been asked to organise the IUCN SSC Global Reptile Assessment, GRA. This is in keeping with previous activities in which ZOO/ CBSG, South Asia's Conservation Assessment and Management Plan workshops for amphibians and small non-volant mammals. Although we have announced that this GRA workshop is impending for quite some time, it is a happening thing and will take place within the next year or two.

Regarding amphibians, the Report of the



South Asian Amphibian CAMP and GAA which was conducted together in 2003, is only now in a genuine completion stage due to the need to sort out conflicting information and differences in assessments. Sanjay Molur had visited Conservation International, worked with Simon Stuart and Neil Cox, to sort out the anomalies. Factual information about each species has been put into an improved data base and is almost ready to be uploaded on Threatened Taxa Monitoring System (TTMS) website <[www.southasianataxa.org](http://www.southasianataxa.org)> and analysed for the Report of the South Asian Amphibian CAMP which will come out subsequently.



Finally, for Wildlife Week education programmes throughout the country, ZOO has brought out a slightly modified version of the **Amphibian : Global WarNing !** educational packet as well as a re-print of the very successful **Go Gharial ! Go back to Survival** in view of recent attempts to revive conservation activities on behalf of this now Critically Endangered reptile.

A large portion of this issue is about Herptiles ... first a short piece about Gharial and a series of reports and articles to catch our readers up with what the Conservation Breeding Specialist Group CBSG and the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums WAZA are doing to drive a big chunk of amphibian conservation actions worldwide.

### Gharial Multi-Task Force & Gharial Action Plan for India

#### TERMS OF REFERENCE AND JOB DESCRIPTION for Gharial Conservation Coordinator

##### Background:

The gharial is in imminent danger of extinction. When the population of this unique crocodylian was determined to be on the brink of extinction is the early 1970s with a total wild population of under 200, the Government of India requested the FAO/UNDP to formulate a crocodile recovery programme for all three species. Over 3 decades about 12,000 gharial eggs were collected from wild nests and gharial were bred in captivity. Over 5000 young gharial were released, mostly in Protected Areas. While numbers built up in some areas like the Chambal River (and subsequently crashed), in other places like the Mahanadi in Orissa only 2 gharial have survived although 700 were released there.

At present there are an estimated 200 wild adult gharial and breeding is taking place at only four locations in the wild: Chambal River (68 nests in 2006), Girwa River (20 nests in 2006), Son River (2 nests in 2006) and the Rapti/ Narayani River in Nepal (6 nests in 2006). The gharial is confirmed extinct in the wild in Burma, Pakistan, Bhutan and probably Bangladesh.



There are less than ten Crocodile Specialist Group members in India and Nepal who are knowledgeable about the status of gharial in the wild and in 2004 two of these field workers, Dr. R.K. Sharma and D. Basu reported a 50% decline in the number of gharial in the Chambal River, the last large repository for the species. This alarming news was the catalyst for the formation of the Gharial Multi-Task Force. In June, 2006 a Gharial Crisis Workshop was convened at the 18th Meeting of the Crocodile Specialist Group in Montelimar, France. Recognizing that all the Task Force members already have full time occupations and would not be able to devote enough time for this vital task, one of the recommendations was that a dedicated Gharial Conservation Coordinator be appointed to carry out the activities that are urgently needed to ensure the survival of the gharial. Accordingly, funds were solicited for this post, initially for a one year period and renewable. Thus, the Gharial Multi-Task Force, based at the Madras Crocodile Bank/Centre for Herpetology is looking to fill the following post as soon as possible:



**Job Title:** Gharial Conservation Coordinator

**Job Duration:** One year (renewable)

**Consolidated Salary:** Rs. 15,000 per month

**Consolidated Expenses:** For travel, office expenses, accommodation, insurance, based on actuals

**Job Location:** Briefing, data collection and on-the-job-training at Madras Crocodile Bank (two to three weeks) and subsequently on a variable-time, rotational basis at three (and likely more) North Indian locations: Jiwaji University in Gwalior, Wildlife Preservation Society of India in New Delhi (with some constraints on space and timing) and Assam (Ecosystems-India, Guwahati).

**Direct Supervisors:** Romulus Whitaker, Executive Officer, Gharial Multi-Task Force and Nikhil Whitaker, Chairman Gharial Multi-Task Force

**Other Key Contacts:**

Harry Andrews, Director Madras Crocodile Bank Core Group, Gharial Multi-Task Force (being formed)

**Starting Time:** Immediate

**Candidate Requirements:**

Minimum of five years experience with conservation activities, coordination and facilitation of fund-raising, publicity/advocacy campaigns, public education, eco-development projects, ability to do field work when required.

Candidate must be out-going and an excellent communicator, keeping in mind that saving the gharial is more about managing people than managing the animal or the habitat.

Languages: English and Hindi

Skills: Basic computer, correspondence/report/project proposal/grant applications. Dynamism, interest and enthusiasm for wildlife conservation activities and people's participation.

Submit a covering letter of about 100 words stating the reasons for your interest in this post, your Curriculum Vitae and a minimum of three reference letters from persons who are familiar with your work and personality.

**Job Description:**

1. Familiarization with the entire gharial story, historical and present: status, distribution, habits, habitats, threats, conflicts with people and mitigation through education, community involvement. Establish contact and continually liaise with everyone involved in gharial conservation.

**India:** State and Central Government wildlife managers, bureaucrats, politicians; environmental and social NGOs, field

researchers, media.

**Abroad:** Liaise with gharial researchers/ conservationists in other gharial range countries. Fund-raising, awareness building via zoos and special interest groups, media, net-working for research and conservation collaborations). In general become the walking encyclopedia and primary link person for the critically endangered gharial, specifically:

1. Help to develop the Gharial Multi-Task Force (GMTF) as a credible, scientifically based action and advocacy group. Start a database of GMTF members and anyone working with or interested in gharial and/or gharial habitat conservation. Develop linkages with key government staff in the gharial range states/ countries.
2. Communicate with all the GMTF members and strengthen the membership base with the people who can contribute to gharial conservation in the form of fund-raising, scientific, political, media, educational inputs.
3. Oversee and manage the GMTF website which is in its infancy. Help develop the website as an interesting and exciting site that people look forward to logging onto again and again. Motivate GMTF members and other interested people to contribute to the website.
4. Develop an international fund-raising strategy, building upon what has already been established with several zoos and individuals in the USA and Europe, making sure that funders get regular updates. Keep track of funds and project proposals for gharial conservation from range states/countries. Liaise with the GMTF Core Group on these matters.
5. Assist the GMTF Core Group members in implementing a prioritized conservation strategy, based on the International Gharial Recovery Action Plan (IGRAP), presently being formulated.
6. Start a database for wild and captive gharial (with an international studbook, which means keeping in close touch with zoos keeping gharial) which will be incorporated into the website and updated regularly. To include mapping and keeping tabs on the latest population status surveys and collating for the database.
7. Identify other workers in riverine ecology in the gharial range states and countries, networking with such researchers and NGOs doing socio-economic development activities.
8. Identify State and Central Government schemes and policies that could impact gharial conservation positively or negatively and in the latter case, ring the alarm bell and initiate action through GMTF members.
9. Organize and help to implement an advocacy campaign using our links with relevant people and agencies, volunteer help and other means to bring the plight of the gharial the rivers they inhabit (and the steps that need to be taken to mitigate the precarious situation) to the State and Central decision-makers.
10. Collect and collate survey and research data on the gharial-past, present, future and maintain a bibliography of gharial literature.
11. Assist in the convening of periodic GMTF meetings and act as facilitator amongst the membership.
12. Any and all other activities that will further the cause of gharial conservation.



**Address for communication:**  
Romulus Whitaker, Executive Officer  
**Gharial Multi-Task Force**

Post Box 21, Chengalpattu, TN 60300, Phone: 044 2742 0195  
Email: serpentcatcher@yahoo.com