

Project Update: August 2013

I surveyed Corbett Tiger Reserve (consisting of the Corbett National Park and the Sonanadi Wildlife Sanctuary) in 2008 and discovered that the Critically Endangered gharial was found here previously unknown to science. During these surveys, I documented 42 adults (including 10 adult males) and 59 smaller size classes of the species that lived and bred in the static environs of the Kalagarh Reservoir of the reserve. The only known meta-population of the species to live in a lake - like environment making this population truly unique. I also documented that the species was nesting in the reserve during these surveys.

I have continued surveys in Corbett Tiger Reserve since 2010 in an initial phase with Dr Alison Leslie (Vice Chair for South and East Africa, IUCN SSC Crocodile Specialist Group) as the Scientific Advisor.

Our surveys this year in Corbett National Park alone have documented 49 adults (inclusive of 10 adult males) with the main sub-population at Dhikala recording a Percent (Straight Line) Growth Rate of 77.77% with an Annual Percent Growth Rate of 15.55% over a 5-year period from 2008-2013.

As we complete surveys in the Sonanadi Wildlife Sanctuary of Corbett Tiger Reserve we expect further data to add up to our figures. We have also documented for the first time in Corbett National Park the hatching of 350-400 gharial hatchlings in the Boksar area which suggest that the water dynamics of vast Kalagarh Reservoir plays an important role in the successful hatching of the species and would be investigated further.

We plan to continue further studies on crocodiles and freshwater turtles in Corbett and direct our research and survey work as we document distribution, size-class structure and habitat use, encounter rates and sex ratios and nesting ecology of gharial in Corbett Tiger Reserve, as we progress in understanding one of the least known and least studied gharial populations in the world.