

## Project Update: July 2021

The project is progressing steadily as planned. Our team conducted reconnaissance surveys in three new fringe communities in January 2021. For our current study, we randomly constructed four 5 km transects along a 50 km stretch of the Jimi River covering both old and new survey areas. We conducted dry season surveys between January and March 2021 by visiting each transect twice giving a cumulative survey distance of 40 km. From the survey, we directly encountered 27 individuals of West African slender snouted crocodiles (*Mecistops cataphractus*) as well as several signs of presence including footprints and tracks. The average encounter rate was 0.68 crocodile/km route surveyed. We conducted nest searches during the peak (April) of the nesting season and found a total of eight nests of *M. cataphractus* under construction. We revisited the eight nests in May 2021 to collect clutch attribute data. Unfortunately, six of the nests were abandoned at the construction stage and no eggs were laid. It is not clear what might have resulted in the crocodiles abandoning their nests because there were no visible signs of habitat disturbances around those nests. The remaining two active nests had clutch sizes of 20 eggs and 18 eggs respectively.

The two nests are being monitored closely by the team to determine the hatching and nesting success. One major threat identified during the field surveys is the activities of illegal gold mining which is rapidly modifying the remaining forest patches serving as critical nesting areas for the species. Plans are underway to commence social surveys in the fringe communities to assess local perception and knowledge of *M. cataphractus*. Arrangements are also being made to commence awareness campaigns as well as wet season crocodile surveys. We are optimistic about achieving all project objectives because the team has not encountered any significant challenge since the beginning of the project.



West African slender-snouted nest found along the Jimi River in Obuasi.



Field Assistant undertaking morphometric measurements of *Mecistops cataphractus* eggs in Obuasi.



Juvenile *Mecistops cataphractus* encountered during reconnaissance survey in the Jimi River.



Juvenile *Mecistops cataphractus* basking along the Jimi River in Obuasi.



Illegal mining activities along the Jimi River in Obuasi.