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### American Crocodile Education receives grant for Nature Conservation

Belmopan December 15, 2010 Biologist Cherie Chenot-Rose of ACES / American Crocodile Education Sanctuary received notification that she is the awardee of Rufford Small Grant Foundation for Nature Conservation in the amount of £5394 toward her project the "American Crocodile, *Crocodylus acutus*, Population and Habitat Viability Assessment and Conservation in Ambergris Caye, Belize."

The project will substantiate the American Crocodile, *Crocodylus acutus*, population and habitat viability on Ambergris Caye in Belize through daylight, eye-shine and nest sighting surveys; kind crocodile tagging; and habitat assessments. Health, size, sex, and location of encountered crocodiles will be utilized to generate a population structure and distribution to aid the Belize Forest Department in developing an effective management program for the conservation of this threatened species and its habitat on Ambergris Caye.

Based on ACES/American Crocodile Education Sanctuary's crocodile rescue data from 2008 to 2010, croc-human conflicts on Ambergris Caye are steadily increasing due to indiscriminate development and both illegal and indirect crocodile feeding. Findings also show a dramatic increase in the destruction of critical Red Mangrove habitats, especially crocodile nesting areas; low hatchling survival rates; and a rise in the number of needless crocodile killings and poaching.

Random, nocturnal spotlight and daylight surveying explorations will be conducted from a powered skiff and golf-cart. Survey regions include waterways, lagoons and immediate waterfront areas on Ambergris Caye. Crocodiles will be captured by protocol, measured, sexed, assessed for health status, tagged with a brass tag securely clamped on the first, single, upright caudal scute and then released. Identifying, studying and protecting American Crocodiles and their nesting sites in Belize is crucial, before additional unnecessary and preventable habitat destruction and nonsensical killing augments the demise of these magnificent reptiles. The collected data from this project will prove pertinent for implementing conservation and sustainable management efforts for American Crocodiles and protection plans for their bio-diverse, Red Mangrove, wetland habitats in Belize.

Lastly, a broader impact resulting from this project is an increase in public awareness about crocodile conservation. Working closely with communities during data collection will present the opportunity to educate the local populace on the importance of crocodiles in Belize's ecosystems and how to safely coexist with them; thus expectantly, reducing croc-human conflicts and nonsensical crocodile killings in Belize.

*Ends.*