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# Camera trap working well on Forestry, Unimas study of estuarine crocodiles



FOR STUDY: First documented camera trapped photograph of the Estuarine Crocodile (*Crocodylus porosus*). Crocs usually retreat when approached by humans.

KUCHING: Forestry Department Sarawak and the Department of Zoology, Faculty of Resource Science and Technology of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) are collaborating on an experimental study to better understand the ecology of saltwater or estuarine crocodiles '*Crocodylus porosus*' in Kuching Wetlands National Park (KWNP).

A statement issued by Unimas yesterday said: "Known to be the largest living reptile, the species has also been reported to be the largest riparian predator in the world."

The estuarine crocodile is a generalist carnivore and has a tendency to take almost everything that comes to its territory as its prey, and these would include carrion, insects, crustaceans, fish, shore birds, otters, snakes, flying foxes, monkeys, cattle, buffaloes or even human beings, depending on the size of the predator.

Some scientists, however, suggest that attacks on humans are occasionally territorial in nature rather than predatory, and this might be true to some extent as crocodiles usually retreat when approached by human beings.

The camera trapping exercise of estuarine crocodiles within KWNP is aimed to explore the possibility of the use of infra-red sensed cameras in the field to study animal ecology and its behaviour associated with mangrove swamp and aquatic habitat.

Leading the study, Engkamat Lading, Dayang Nuriza Abdillah and their team from the Forest Department, who are collaborating with Dr Mohd Azlan Jayasilan Abdul Gulam Azad and undergraduate student Siti Zulaiha Jamal from Unimas.

"In the past, we used a similar method to understand the distribution of secretive carnivores in Totally Protected Areas (TPAs) and have discovered many interesting findings, but now is the first time we are testing this method on the cold blooded species such as the estuarine crocodile in Sarawak, and quite surprisingly it appears that the device seems to work effectively on the species," commented Dr Mohd Azlan.

As a trial, a pair of camera traps was set up at certain sites around Pulau Liak in KWNP in June 22 this year, resulting in the capture of 108 videos and 1,926 photographs.

The photographs comprising 31 pictures of estuarine crocodiles (coming up to the river bank, or still partly submerged in the shallow water near the bank), show a herd of otters and several pictures of crab-eating monkeys, *Macaca fascicularis*.

The pictures of the estuarine crocodiles were captured during both high and low tides while that of the mammals (otters and monkeys) were captured during low tide only at day time.

Dr Mohd Azlan said with this success, they would now try to better understand the activity pattern of the crocodilian species in KWNP, after which the exercise would be extended to other crocodile-infested rivers throughout Sarawak to scientifically establish times when estuarine crocodile are most active.

Such information, he said, is very important in the management of the man-eaters.

For more information, members of the public are advised to contact Dr Mohd Azlan at 082-582938 or email him at [azlan@frst.unimas.my](mailto:azlan@frst.unimas.my).

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