



Surge in Saltwater Crocodile Population in the Sundarbans

Why in News?

The 2024-25 population assessment and habitat ecology report on [saltwater crocodiles](#) (*Crocodylus porosus*) in the [Sundarbans](#), released by the State Forest Department at the **Sajnekhali Wildlife Sanctuary**, highlights a modest increase in their population, signaling positive trends in the region's wildlife conservation efforts.

Key Points

- **Population Assessment:** The population of saltwater crocodiles in the Sundarbans has increased, with the latest report indicating a range between **220 to 242** crocodiles, up from **204 to 234** in **2023-24**.
 - A total of **213 crocodiles** were sighted during the exercise, a rise from the **168** seen in **2023-24**.
- **Environmental and Habitat Insights:** Crocodiles in the Sundarbans are typically found in creeks with widths ranging from **10-130 metres**, preferring a salinity range of **10-23 parts per thousand (ppt)** and temperatures between **20°C-30°C** during the winter months.
- **Positive Trends in Hatchlings:** The report notes an **increase in hatchling sightings**, a rare and encouraging sign for crocodile conservation in the region, suggesting a healthy reproductive trend.

Key Facts Related to Salt-water Crocodiles

- **About:** It is the **largest of all crocodilians**, and the largest reptile in the world.
 - **Female saltwater crocodiles are smaller in size** than their male counterparts, normally reaching a maximum length of 2.5 to 3 m.
 - They **tolerate salinity** and are found mostly in coastal waters or near rivers. They are also found in freshwater near rivers and swamps.
- **Distribution:** **Tropical to warm temperate latitudes** in the eastern Indian and western Pacific oceans.
- **Habitat:** [Mangrove forests](#) and other coastal habitats
 - The **Sundarbans** (the largest mangrove forest), **Bhitarkanika** (India's second-largest mangrove forest), and the [Andaman and Nicobar Islands](#) are among the **three major strongholds of saltwater crocodiles**.
- **Prey:** **Juvenile saltwater crocodiles** eat **small insects**, amphibians, and fish, while **adults** prey on **crabs, turtles, birds, and mammals**.
 - They **ambush prey by hiding in water**, killing it with a snap of their jaws, and dragging it underwater to consume.
- **Conservation Status:**
 - [IUCN Red list](#) : Least Concern
 - [WPA, 1972](#): Schedule I
 - [CITES](#) : Appendix I/II

Sundarbans

- **Location:** The **largest mangrove forest** in the world, located in the **delta of the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna rivers**, on the Bay of Bengal.
 - It is **located 40% in India**, with the rest in Bangladesh.
- **Ecosystem:** **Ecotone between land and sea** (tropical and subtropical regions).
 - Rich mix of habitats: freshwater swamps, intertidal mangroves, saline forests, and open water.
- **Global Recognition:**
 - **UNESCO World Heritage Site:** [1987 \(India\)](#), 1997 (Bangladesh).
 - [Sundarban Wetland \(India\)](#) recognized as a **Ramsar site** (Jan 2019).
 - **Project Tiger:** [Royal Bengal tigers](#) are top predators, maintaining ecosystem balance.

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