



Reptile Census at Bhitarkanika National Park

[Source: DTE](#)

Why in News?

The annual **reptile census** at [Bhitarkanika National Park \(BNP\)](#) has revealed that [saltwater crocodiles](#) in BNP stands at **1,826** in 2025, including **18 albino crocodiles** (rare white crocodiles).

Note: The census was conducted using the **Timestamp Camera App** to record **video with time watermarks** and **GPS**, improving accuracy and minimizing human error.

What is the Crocodile Conservation Project?

- **About:** It was started in **1975** at **Bhitarkanika National Park, Odisha**, to protect and conserve the population of three endangered species of crocodiles i.e., [Mugger](#), [Gharial](#), and **Saltwater Crocodile**.
- **Goals:** It was started to increase the population so that **5 to 6 crocodiles** could be sighted **per kilometer of water**.
- **Objectives:**
 - **Protection:** To protect the remaining populations of crocodiles in their **natural habitats** by creating **sanctuaries**.
 - **Rebuilding Populations:** Using a '**grow and release**' or '**rear and release**' approach through **egg collection, incubation, rearing, release and monitoring**.
 - **Personnel Training:** Training personnel at project sites and the **Central Crocodile Breeding and Management Institute, Hyderabad**.
- **Implementation:** The project was initiated with assistance from the [United Nations Development Programme \(UNDP\)](#) and [Food and Agriculture Organization \(FAO\)](#).
 - Important crocodile conservation sanctuaries include:
 - **Bhitarkanika National Park** (Odisha) for saltwater crocodiles.
 - [National Chambal Sanctuary](#) (spanning Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh) for gharials.
- **Achievement:** Since the **1975** launch of the [Crocodile Conservation Project](#), the saltwater crocodile population has steadily risen.
 - The crocodile breeding program in the park was **stopped in 2024** due to **population saturation**, but eggs are still collected annually and **bred for tourists**.

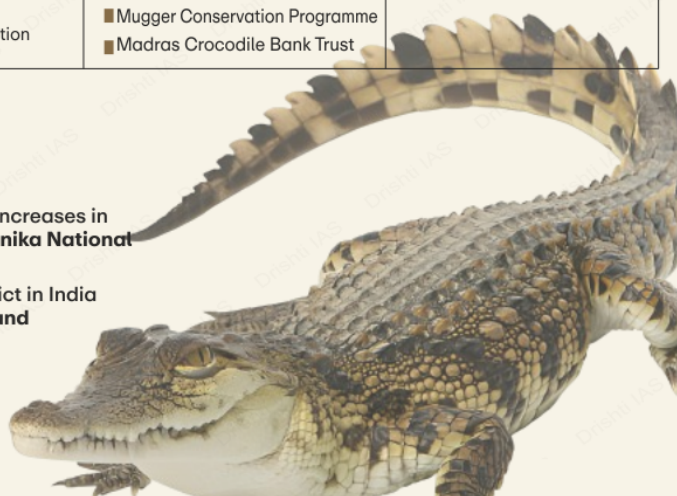
CROCODILE SPECIES IN INDIA

India harbours three diverse  crocodile species—Mugger, Saltwater, and Gharial—found in distinct habitats nationwide.

Aspects	Gharial	Mugger/Indian Crocodile	Saltwater Crocodile
Scientific Name	<i>Gavialis Gangeticus</i> 	<i>Crocodylus Palustris</i> 	<i>Crocodylus Porosus</i> 
Distribution: India	Viable Population: National Chambal Sanctuary (U.P, Raj, M.P) Small Non-Breeding Population: Son, Gandak, Hooghly, Ghagra & Satkosia WLS (Odisha)	Throughout India	East Coast (Odisha's Bhitarkarnika WLS, Andaman & Nicobar Islands coast & Sundarbans)
Distribution: Neighbourhood	Brahmaputra of Bhutan & Bangladesh & Irrawaddy River	Extinct in Bhutan and Myanmar	Across Southeast Asia
Special Feature	Longest of all Crocodile, Long and thin Snout	Egg-laying, Hole-nesting, Wide & U-shaped Snout	Largest living reptile, Pointed & V-shaped Snout
Habitat	Freshwater	Freshwater	Saltwater, Brackish & Wetlands
IUCN Status	CR	VU	LC
CITES Status	Appendix I	Appendix I	Appendix I
CMS Status	Appendix I	-	Appendix II
WPA,1972 Status	Schedule I	Schedule I	Schedule I
Threats	Dams, Pollution, Sand mining	Habitat Destruction	Hunted for its skin and Habitat loss
Government Initiatives	■ Odisha: Rs. 1000 award to conserve Gharial in Mahanadi River Basin ■ Indian Crocodile Conservation Project,1975	■ Indian Crocodile Conservation Project,1975 ■ Mugger Conservation Programme ■ Madras Crocodile Bank Trust	Indian Crocodile Conservation Project,1975

MISCELLANEOUS FACTS

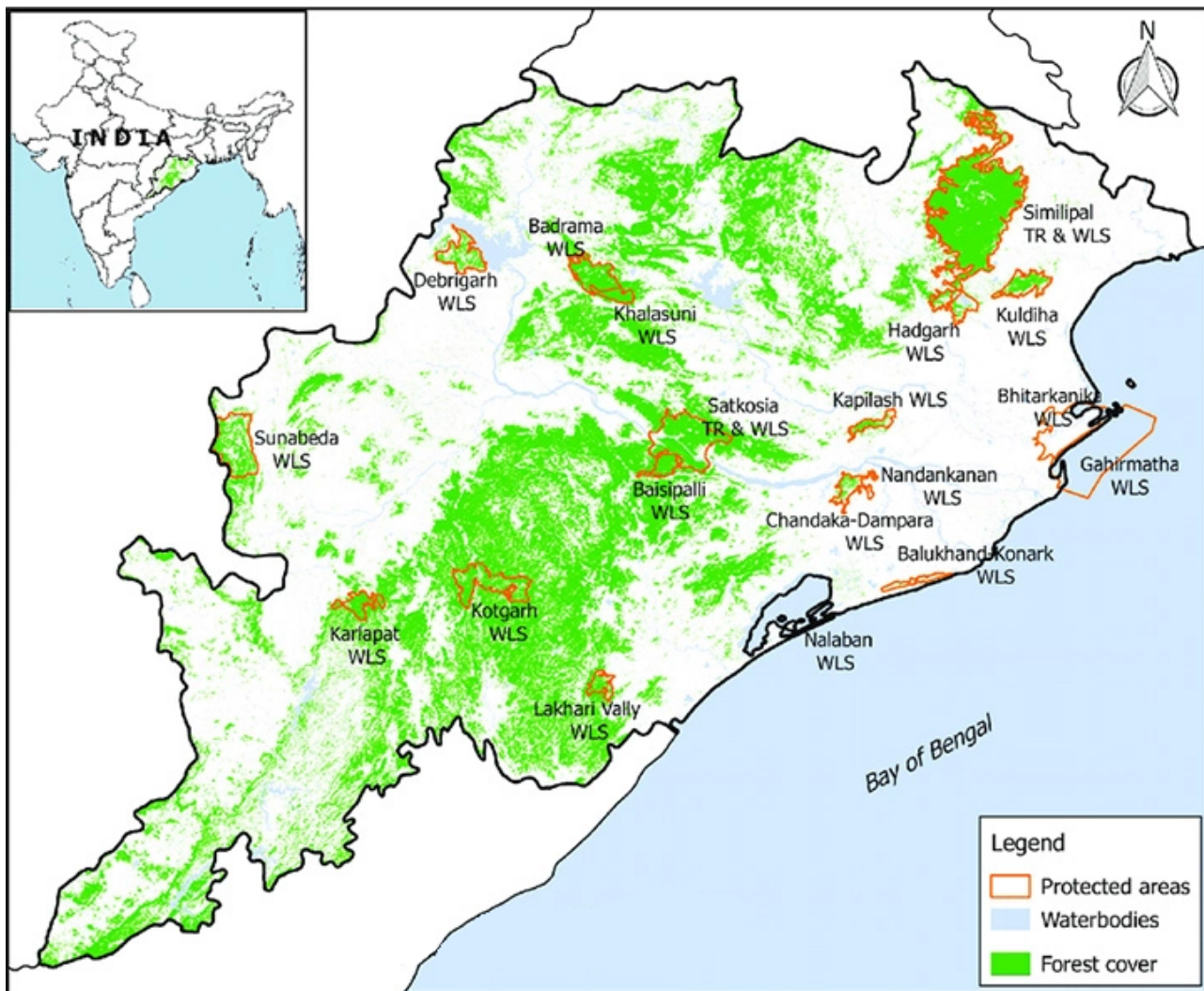
- 🕒 17th June: World Crocodile Day
- 📊 Annual Reptile Census, 2023: Marginal Increases in number of saltwater crocodiles (Bhitarkanika National Park and its nearby areas)
- 📍 Odisha's Kendrapara District: Only district in India where all three species of crocodiles found



What are Key Facts About BNP?

- **About:** Located in **Odisha**, BNP is **India's 2nd largest mangrove ecosystem**, after the **Sunderbans**.
 - Recognized as a **Ramsar Site**, it is a significant **wetland** of international importance.
- **Ecosystem:** BNP comprises a **network of creeks and canals**, fed by waters from the **Brahmani, Baitarani, Dhamra**, and **Patasala** rivers, creating a unique ecosystem.
 - **Proximity to the Bay of Bengal** enriches the soil with salts, supporting **tropical and subtropical intertidal vegetation**.
- **Fauna:** It is home to the **largest congregation of saltwater crocodiles** in India. Other notable species include **water monitor lizards, pythons, and hyenas**.
- **Key Features:**

- **Gahirmatha Beach:** Located in BNP, it is the **largest nesting site for [Olive Ridley Sea Turtles](#)**.
- **Bagdahana (Heronry):** Near the **Surajpore creek**, thousands of **birds nest** and perform **aerial acrobatics** before mating, creating an impressive spectacle.



UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question:

Prelims

Q. If you want to see gharials in their natural habitat, which one of the following is the best place to visit? (2017)

- (a) Bhitarkanika Mangroves
- (b) Chambal River
- (c) Pulicat Lake
- (d) Deepor Beel

Ans: (b)

Q. Consider the following pairs: (2010)

Protected area	Well-known for
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1. Bhitarkanika, Orissa: Salt Water Crocodile
2. Desert National Park, Rajasthan: Great Indian Bustard
3. Eravikulam, Kerala : Hoolak Gibbon

Which of the pairs given above is/are correctly matched?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 1 and 2 only
- (c) 2 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (b)

PDF Refernece URL: <https://www.drishtiias.com/printpdf/reptile-census-at-bhitarkanika-national-park>

