

ODISHA RENEWS EFFORT TO REVIVE GHARIAL POPULATION

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Biodiversity, Ecology, and Wildlife Related Issues

Wildlife officials releasing a gharial into the Mahanadi river in Odisha. Special arrangement

Odisha has renewed its effort to revive the population of gharials, a “critically endangered” species of crocodile, in their natural habitat by releasing five reptiles into the Satkosia gorge of Mahanadi — the southernmost limit of gharials’ home range in India.

These gharials, including three females and two males, were bred at the Nandankanan Zoological Park. They were released into the gorge on Saturday. The gharials are individually marked and fitted with radio transmitters for future identification and tracking of their migration route.

“The gharials are of appropriate age and size — more than three years of age and one meter in length. They will help in gathering information on migration and factors affecting their survival,” said Ajay Mohapatra, Principal Chief Wildlife Warden, Odisha.

Plan to release more

“We plan to release 30 gharials in the future in a phased manner — 10 of them in a year. The technical assistance for biotelemetry is being provided by the gharial Telemetry Project, The Madras Crocodile Bank Trust,” he added.

The department has engaged three postgraduate research scholars for day-to-day observation and keeping track of the released reptiles.

According to the wildlife wing of the Odisha State Forest Department, gharials, the large reptiles which were abundant in the main rivers and tributaries of the Indus, Ganga, Brahmaputra and Mahanadi-Brahmani, are now limited to only 14 widely spaced and restricted locations in India and Nepal.

Furthermore, Odisha is the only State in India having all three species — gharial, mugger and saltwater crocodile. The State forest department began conservation of these crocodile species in 1975 by establishing three rearing centres — Tikarpada for gharials in Angul district, Ramatirtha for muggers in Mayurbhanj and Bhitarkanika for saltwater crocodiles in Kendrapara district.

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