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## ASSESSMENT OF WILD SALTWATER CROCODILE POPULATION IN BAKO RIVER, WESTERN SARAWAK, MALAYSIAN BORNEO FOR POTENTIAL ECOTOURISM INDUSTRY

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### Abstract

*For decades, saltwater crocodiles are feared by the public, but the sentiment has gradually changed because local people livelihood has improved by ecotourism industry. Wild crocodile sighting is now being offered as one of ecotourism products in Sarawak but the activity is based solely on local knowledge. The objective of this study is to determine relative density and distribution of saltwater crocodiles along the Bako River, Sarawak during different monsoon seasons. Standard night spotting technique was deployed during northeast monsoon (NEM), southwest monsoon (SWM) and inter-monsoon (IM). Other works involved documenting riparian landscape along the river and measuring water pH, temperature and salinity. Approximately 117, 60, 92 wild crocodiles had been spotted during SWM, IM, and NEM, respectively. Relative density fluctuated with 3.65, 1.93 and 4.67 non-hatchling/km among seasons. Adults could be seen either resting on river banks or in the middle part of the river while juveniles appeared in small groups near mangrove patches. Data obtained will help relevant state agencies and ecotourism industry players to improve crocodile watching activity offered to tourists. This is important in order to ensure maximum enjoyable experience (without compromising safety) among tourists as well as benefiting local communities.*

### Author Keywords

saltwater crocodiles, monsoon season, density, distribution, ecotourism

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