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Final Report

An ecological study of the remaining areas of riverine forest in the Jubba valley, southern Somalia

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CROCODILES IN THE JUBBA VALLEY, SOUTHERN SOMALIA

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The Nile crocodile Crocodilus niloticus has become rare in Somalia (Simonetta and Simonetta, 1983) but appears to be still common along the Middle Jubba. We recorded crocodiles at several places. A 2m individual was seen on the east bank above the dam at Fanoole, a 3m crocodile on the west bank opposite Kaski village, four individuals on a sandbank just above Bu'aale, and on the afternoon of 14.8.86 twenty-two on a 250m sandbank opposite Banta village and a further twenty on a 200m sandbank about 1.5km upstream of Banta. At least seven crocodiles also occurred in the dhesheeg at Shoonto North.

Female Nile crocodiles prefer to dig their nests in gently sloping sandy beaches, particularly in spots which have some shade from fringing vegetation. Many suitable sandbanks occur along the Middle and Lower Jubba which probably explains the sizeable population of crocodiles in this region.

We gathered no evidence that Somalis hunted crocodiles for their hides. Somalis kill crocodiles because they occasionally take livestock and people. Locals at Banta claimed that crocodiles had killed five adults and six children within the previous five years, although they seemed to view these creatures with such fear and mysticism that this may have been an exaggeration. Generally only the larger individuals take large mammal prey, intermediate-sized crocodiles feed predominately on fish, often species predatory on human food fisheries (Cott, 1961).

It is likely that the destruction of riverine habitats and the cultivation of most of the dhesheegs along the Jubba and Shabeelle, rather than hunting, has been the principal reason for the reduced crocodile population in Somalia. Riverine habitats are particularly important to the very young crocodiles who spend much of their time on land and derive refuge, shade and probably a significant proportion of their invertebrate food from these areas. Adult crocodiles will also seek shade in riverine vegetation during the middle of the day and, as mentioned above, that fringing the river gives shade to the nest sites.

Populations of Nile crocodiles have declined in many countries in Africa and their status is now considered serious. The IUCN Red Data Book (Groombridge, 1985) lists this species as 'vulnerable'. The population along the Jubba is probably the largest in Somalia, although the swamps of the Lower Shabeelle may also support significant numbers of crocodiles. In view of the decline of this species in Somalia and its international importance in Africa, protection of the Nile crocodile and its habitats along the Jubba must be built into any agricultural development programme for the Valley.