

Magnets might dissuade crocodiles from settling in neighborhoods

February 24 2009, By Doug Phillips

Magnets taped to the heads of captured crocodiles could keep them from returning to South Florida neighborhoods where they're not wanted, state wildlife officials said Monday.

State biologists are studying the temporary use of magnets to disrupt the internal navigation of federally and state-protected American crocodiles, which have been spotted most often in neighborhoods of Miami-Dade and Monroe counties in Florida.

"Scientists in Mexico have reported success in using magnets to break the homing cycle," said Lindsey Hord, crocodile response coordinator for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

When crocodiles show up where they don't belong, they're typically captured and transported to a suitable habitat as far away as possible, according to commission officials.

"Unfortunately, they usually return," said spokeswoman Gabriella Ferraro.

State biologists say crocodiles that have been relocated will travel an average of 10 miles a week to return to where they were captured.

As part of the study, trappers have been told to attach magnets to sides of the reptile's head where it's captured.

The magnets are supposed to disorient the crocodiles and disrupt their navigation so they can't find their way back.

The magnets are removed from the crocodile's head when it's released, and a colored tag is attached to its tail for later identification in case it returns.

The procedure has been used a few times during the past few weeks, Ferraro said.

Besides protecting crocodiles from vehicles and other hazards that could injure them if they try to return, the magnets could also help keep more of them in the wild.

Generally, if a crocodile returns three times, and under certain other circumstances, it gets placed into captivity.

An estimated 2,000 crocodiles are thought to be in the wild in South Florida.

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