

Endangered crocodiles released to fight extinction

January 27 2011



A local tourist handles a baby crocodile at the Crocodile Farm wildlife rescue and conservation center in Puerto Princesa, Philippines, in 2004. Nineteen of the world's most critically endangered crocodiles have been released into the wild in the Philippines as part of efforts to save the species from extinction.

Nineteen of the world's most critically endangered crocodiles were released Thursday into the wild in the Philippines as part of efforts to save the species from extinction, conservationists said.

The freshwater crocodiles, which had been reared for 18 months at a breeding centre, were set free in a national park in the remote north of the country that is one of just two remaining natural habitats for the reptile.

If they survive, the number of known Philippine crocodiles in the wild

will increase by roughly a fifth, according to Marites Balbas, spokeswoman for the Mabuwaya Foundation that is behind the conservation programme.

"The Philippine crocodile is the world's most severely threatened crocodile species with less than 100 adults remaining in the wild. It could go extinct in 10 years if nothing is done," Balbas said.

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature lists the Philippine crocodile as "critically endangered," just one step away from being extinct in the wild.

The Philippine crocodile has plunged to the verge of [extinction](#) due to destruction of its habitat, dynamite fishing and killings by humans who consider it dangerous, said Balbas.

However the released crocodiles -- which are only 35 to 50 centimetres (14 to 20 inches) long -- will be safe in the park, according to Balbas.

"There is enough food and people are educated on how to protect them. We actually have groups in the local community who guard the sanctuary. They are aware that killing crocodiles is prohibited," she said.

The crocodiles can grow up to 2.7 metres (nine feet) long.

Thursday's events continue a programme that began in 2005 in which dozens of captive-raised Philippine [crocodiles](#) have been released back into the wild in the Sierra Madre Natural Park in the northern province of Isabela.

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Citation: Endangered crocodiles released to fight extinction (2011, January 27) retrieved 26

April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-01-endangered-crocodiles-extinction.html>

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