

Additional records on the altitudinal range of Philippine Crocodile (*Crocodylus mindorensis*) in Abra Province, Luzon Island, Philippines

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Observer: Meljory D. Corvera.
Photographs by: Meljory D. Corvera.
Subject identified by: Rainier I. Manalo.

Location: Barangay Alaoa, Tineg, Abra, Philippines.
Elevation: ca. 240 metres ASL.
Habitat: Freshwater river with large boulders along the banks.
Date and time: 07 April 2022, 08:57 hrs.

Identity of subject: Philippine Crocodile, *Crocodylus mindorensis* (Reptilia: Crocodylia).

Description of record: A crocodile track was found on the mud on the side of a small waterlogged area adjacent to the Binungan river system at an elevation of approximately 240 mASL (Figure 1). The track, apparently made by a right front foot, distinctively belongs to a crocodile due to its relatively short, thick toes, unlike those of monitor lizards which are relatively long and slender (Simpson, 2006). Local residents reported frequent sightings of small-sized crocodiles in the area up until current times. Of the two species of crocodile present in the Philippines, only *Crocodylus mindorensis* is known to inhabit high elevation freshwater habitats surrounded by limestone karst and large boulders.



Fig. 1. Crocodile track on mud at Binungan River.

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Fig. 2. Philippine Crocodile in captivity caught in the 90's from Binungan River, Tineg, Abra. © M.D.Corvera

Remarks: This record provides additional proof that the species continue to exist in the area at high altitudes and that the need for a more focused survey is necessary. Its presence in the highlands of the Cordillera Region was first documented by Manalo (2008) at 850 mASL. The captive individual in Figure 2 was included in the said study and is currently under the care of wildlife registered permittee. In 2012, biological specimens collected in Lake Sebu at 753-798 mASL were confirmed to be those of the Philippine Crocodile, based on morphometric measurements and DNA analysis (Manalo et al., 2018). These findings contradicted previous beliefs that the animal can only be found in the lowlands.

The species was last assessed by IUCN in 2012 (van Weerd et al, 2016) as Critically Endangered (A2cd) based on the observed and inferred population decline of 82% in both known localities in the last 75 years. Further studies on this river system and similar altitudes in historic habitats need to be explored so that a more accurate representation of the population status of *C. mindorensis* can be ascertained.

References:

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