

## 20 ft crocodile skeleton on display in Orissa

The skeleton of a massive 20 feet crocodile, probably one of the largest in India, has been put on display at a wildlife park here for the benefit of researchers and students.

The male crocodile was found dead in September at Kaliabhanjadiha area inside the famous 670 sq km Bhitarkanika National Park, 130 km from the Orissa capital Bhubaneswar, which is home to the largest population of giant saltwater crocodiles in India.

The skeleton is kept at the interpretation centre of the crocodile breeding and rearing farm at Danmal inside the national park, said Bhitarkanika divisional forest officer A.K. Jena.

A team of herpetologists painstakingly brought the skeleton to the centre, preserved it and mounted it on a frame, he added. The whole process took about a month.

The age of the crocodile is not known. 'We will determine it after tests,' said reptile researcher Siba Prasad Prasida who was involved in the elaborate preservation work.

Wildlife officials are now planning to focus on preserving the skull of another crocodile kept by members of the erstwhile royal family Rajkanika in Kendrapada.

According to noted reptile researcher Romulus Whitaker, the skull measures 75 cm, considered to be the largest saltwater crocodile in India.

The size of a skull is nearly one-seventh of the reptile's body length. The reptile therefore could have been 25 ft, Whitaker, who founded the crocodile bank in Chennai, said.

'My grandfather Raja Rajendra Narayan Bhanja Deo had shot the biggest crocodile in 1930 within the park as it had killed many people,' said Shivendra Narayan Bhanja Deo, a member of the royal family which shifted it to his residence in Bhubaneswar.

The Guinness Book of World Records this year registered the presence of a 23 ft estuarine crocodile in Bhitarkanika as the largest crocodile in the world.

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