



The Wildlife Watch Binocular

PO Box 562, New Paltz, NY 12561

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THE REMARKABLE STORY OF THE COMEBACK OF THE SALTWATER CROCODILES



A close-up of a saltwater crocodile | Photo © Bindu Gopal Roa

Captive breeding-led crocodile conservation has boosted the population of estuarine crocodiles that was on the brink of extinction during the 1970s to a healthy 1858 today.

by Bindu Gopal Roa

The Crocodile Hatchery & Rearing Programme in Odisha's Dangamal is a testament to the revival of saltwater crocodiles in the Indian subcontinent.

Revival cues

Living amidst an intricate network of creeks, channels, tidal rivers, and dense mangroves, saltwater crocodiles are a huge draw in the Bhitarkanika National Park today. In fact, the density of the crocodiles here has meant that local tourism is booming.

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BRIDGES IN THE CANOPY

How Rope and Rope Alone Is Changing Wildlife Conservation in South America

by Samuel Peters

Somewhere above the Peruvian Amazon, in the quiet hours between dusk and midnight, a sloth grips a rope suspended between two trees. It moves in its characteristic slow-motion way, hand over deliberate hand, navigating a structure it had no evolutionary preparation for. A camera trap catches every frame. What it records is not just an animal crossing a gap; it is evidence of an idea that is rapidly remaking how scientists think about forest connectivity.

Artificial canopy bridges; systems of suspended ropes, nets, and platforms strung between treetops have existed as a conservation concept for decades. But a new wave of rigorous field research, now emerging from both the Amazon and Brazil's Atlantic Forest, is turning scattered observations into hard science, and hard science into policy.

The Problem With Roads

For most wildlife, a road is an inconvenience. For a sloth, a

monkey, or a porcupine, it can be a death sentence or something nearly as damaging: a permanent wall.

These animals are obligate canopy-dwellers. They eat, sleep, breed, and travel entirely above the forest floor. Many have no instinct for descending to the ground, and some lack the anatomy for it. When a highway cuts through their forest, they do not simply walk around the problem. They stop. They stay on their side of the road, increasingly isolated from

(Continued on Page 3.)

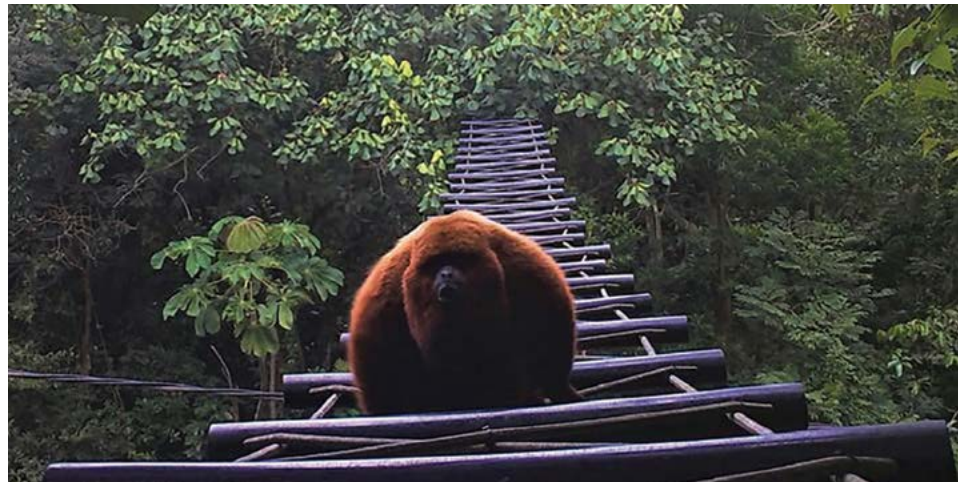


Photo © Smithsonian National Zoo and Conservation Biological Institute



Photo © Smithsonian National Zoo and Conservation Biological Institute

other members of their species, cut off from food sources and potential mates.

The consequences compound with time. Roads isolate animal populations, affecting their genetic diversity and threatening their long-term persistence. A meta-analysis of mammalian species found that arboreal mammals are among those most negatively affected by fragmentation; a pattern that makes intuitive sense. For a flying squirrel or a gibbon, a road is a gap to cross. For a sloth, it may as well not exist as an option.

With the loss of canopy connectivity, animals either come down from the trees and try to cross roads, risking vehicle collisions, or stay at the canopy level and suffer from population isolation, a phenomenon researchers call "the barrier effect." By some estimates, 475 million vertebrate animals are killed by vehicles every year in Brazil alone.

What the Cameras Are Showing

In late 2025, biologists Justin Santiago and Lindsey Swierk of Binghamton University published findings from a [study conducted at the Amazon Conservatory for Tropical Studies in Peru](#), inside a protected reserve near the city of Iquitos. They set up four camera traps at varying heights along a walkway of ropes and wooden bridges spanning between 6 and 36 meters above the ground, and ran the cameras around the clock for three weeks.

The results were striking. The cameras caught a clear pattern: the forest wakes up when the sun goes down. From 7 p.m. to 10 p.m., mammals crossed the bridges again and again. Among the most consistent visitors were Linnaeus's two-toed sloths, which remained active until as late as 4 a.m.

The study also documented porcupines and opossums on the bridges, and captured footage of the streaked dwarf porcupine; a species so rarely observed that scientists classify it as data-deficient.

The researchers were careful to note what the study does not yet prove. Understanding how animals behave on bridges in continuous, undisturbed forest is the necessary foundation before drawing conclusions about fragmented ones. But the data provides exactly the kind of behavioral baseline that future corridor design will need.

From Rope to Road Policy

In Brazil, the stakes are more urgent and the scale larger. Brazil has the fourth-largest road network in the world, which continues to expand. Forty percent of primate species are endangered in Brazil, with habitat fragmentation and vehicle collisions among the main threats they face.

Biologist Fernanda Abra has spent years turning that crisis into a construction project. [Her Reconecta Project](#),



Photo © Smithsonian National Zoo and Conservation Biological Institute

based on Highway BR-174; a 3,300-kilometer highway slicing through the Amazon has taken a deliberately practical approach. Each bridge costs around \$200 in materials, versus tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands of dollars for a conventional overpass or underpass. The structures consist of steel cables, ropes, and nylon nets anchored to concrete posts, and come in two designs: a rope lattice and a single braided cable. [Research has found](#) that kinkajous prefer bridges with X-shaped crossed lines, while monkeys favor mesh netting between the rungs.

By early 2025, the project had constructed 39 bridges and recorded nearly 2,000 crossings by six different species, including black-capped capuchins, critically endangered Alta Floresta titi monkeys, and endangered Schneider's marmosets.

Central to Reconecta's success is a partnership that blurs the line between science and indigenous stewardship. The Waimiri-Atroari people have been collecting data on wildlife roadkill along a 125-kilometer stretch of BR-174 that cuts through their territory since 1997; the largest citizen science project involving an indigenous community on the planet. Their ecological knowledge shaped where the bridges were placed. More than 150 community members participated in their construction.

The Design Problem Nobody Talks About

One of the quieter insights emerging from this research is that a bridge designed for one species may be useless or even avoided by another. A two-parallel-rope design created for gibbons in Southeast Asia may not work for

spider monkeys in the Amazon. Solutions for one species or habitat may not be applicable for another.

This is why the Peru study, conducted in continuous forest rather than fragmented habitat, carries particular value. By observing how animals interact with bridge structures in the absence of road-related stress, researchers can begin to understand species-specific preferences before imposing those structures in crisis zones.

What Comes Next

The momentum is real. Brazil's national transport department has begun recommending standardized canopy bridge models for highway projects. Brazil's infrastructure agency, DNIT, is planning to install almost 100 canopy bridges on the BR-319, the road connecting Porto Velho to Manaus. In Peru, WWF has been installing bridges over logging roads in the Madre de Dios region, where species like kinkajous and night monkeys have been documented using the structures.

The images from these projects are not dramatic. They do not require a predator or a crisis. They are simply animals, doing what animals do, in a corridor that humans built and then got out of the way of.

That, it turns out, may be the most important thing a conservationist can do.

Samuel Peters is an African ecologist and conservationist with the Wildlife Institute. He can be reached at samuelpete786@gmail.com



Photo © Smithsonian National Zoo and Conservation Biological Institute



Baby saltwater crocodiles in the hatchery | Photo © Bindu Gopal Roa

I recently experienced this firsthand when I got on board the Antara River Cruises' plush catamaran.

As Antara is the only player that has permission to dock overnight on the Brahmani, Baitarani, Dhamra, and Patasala rivers, I had the rare opportunity to see these crocodiles up close myself.

This species has been placed in Schedule 1 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, and in Appendix 1 of CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of wild fauna and flora). In India, presently the saltwater crocodiles are limited to Sundarbans, Bhitarkanika, and the Andaman Islands.

During the 1950s and 1960s, illegal hunting of crocodiles was at its peak, and the species was on the verge of extinction. To conserve the saltwater crocodiles along with supporting rich biodiversity and to strengthen management practices, Bhitarkanika was declared a wildlife sanctuary in April 1975. The Saltwater Crocodile Research and Conservation Project was established at Dangmal under the technical guidance of Dr. H.R. Bustard, FAO/UNDP. Chief Technical Advisor to the Government of India. The prime objective of the program was the 'rear and release' of crocodiles to build up the depleted population in the wild.

This is when, for the first time, a clutch of 48 eggs was collected from the Kalibhanjadian island, surrounded by the Dhamara River, in July 1975. Of these, 24 hatchlings, including one white hatchling (locally known as 'Sankhua'), hatched in the third week of Aug. 1975.

At that time, the number of saltwater crocodiles in the river systems of Bhitarkanika Wildlife Sanctuary was estimated by researcher Dr. Sudhakar Kar to be only 96, including 35 adults as per the 1976-1977 winter census. The first release operation was carried out in Dangmal Creek in April 1977 with a batch of 15 juvenile crocodiles of above 1 m length. The depleted population of estuarine crocodiles in the river systems in and around National Park has been built up gradually. Since 1990, mass egg collection for hatchery incubation and release of young ones has been discontinued. And as per the last census, done via drone, the number stands at a staggering 1858.

Hatchery and rearing complex

To understand this better, I visited the hatchery and rearing center at the Kanika Wildlife Range in Dangmal. Here the entire lifecycle of the captive breeding is seen in clear steps. Firstly, after diverting the attention of mother crocodile guarding the nests, eggs are collected very carefully in a container by the nest survey team.

The exact orientation of the eggs, as was observed in the natural nest, is followed while keeping the eggs in the container.

Artificial nests are prepared after processing leaves of Hental (*Phoenix paludosa*), Kharkhari (*Acrostichum aureum*), Nalia (*Myriostachya wightiana*), etc. The nests are externally applied with mud for regulating the temperature and moisture of the nests. The hatchlings hatched out of the artificial nests are allowed to remain for a week on the sandy bed duly disinfected by potassium permanganate solution for post-birth care and development. The hatchlings are then released into the pools filled with natural brackish water. The hatchlings are fed on small live fish and prawns for better growth.

The incubation period of the eggs varies from 75 to 80 days. Lower incubation temperatures (28°C-32°C) produce mostly females, and higher temperatures (33°C-34°C) produce males. Depending on the size and age of the females, the number of eggs laid in each nest varies from 10 to 70 eggs. The eggs are porcelain-white and hard-shelled, and the average weight is 120 gm (range: 100-140 gm). Only one clutch of eggs is laid annually," explains my guide Sanghamitra from Antara Cruises. Prehatching vocalization (croaking sound) is produced by the emerging hatchlings as a call to the mother.

After the emergence of hatchlings from the nest, their congregation is seen in the wallows surrounding the nests, in groups called 'creches.' Mothers actively guard the newborn hatchlings to save them from predators.

In the initial period, hatchlings show gregarious feeding behavior. Males are generally larger and grow above 20 ft (6.1 m), but females can grow up to 12 ft (3.6 m). The maximum weight of an adult male is around 1000 kg, and that of an adult female is around 400 kg, and the snout of a male is U-shaped, whereas that of a female is V-shaped.

At the museum adjoining the hatchery complex I meet Ranjith Biswas, the caretaker, who explains that the largest crocodile here is a whopping 23 feet long. After looking at the various exhibits, including skeletons

of these crocodiles, I watch a film that is a fitting ode to this conservation story. The last words I hear in this beautiful film are “There is no better place in the world for a crocodile to call its home than Bhitarkanika.” And as I head back to the cruise and see so many saltwater crocodiles on this cruise, I can't help but agree.

Bindu Gopal Rao is a freelance writer and photographer from Bengaluru. She enjoys birdwatching and environment, as well as taking the offbeat path when traveling. You can follow her on Instagram @bindugopalrao and find her work on bindugopalrao.com

ALBERT THE ALLIGATOR – THE SAD OUTCOME

by **Maureen Schiener**



Tony holding Albert as a baby.

This is a final update on the status of Albert the Alligator who was confiscated by New York's DEC in March, 2024.

After years of back-and-forth litigation, the guardian of Albert the Alligator has given up his fight. Albert had been seized by the Department of Environmental Conservation without notifying Tony Cavallaro, in whose home Albert had lived in a special enclosure complete with a swimming pool, for over 30 years.

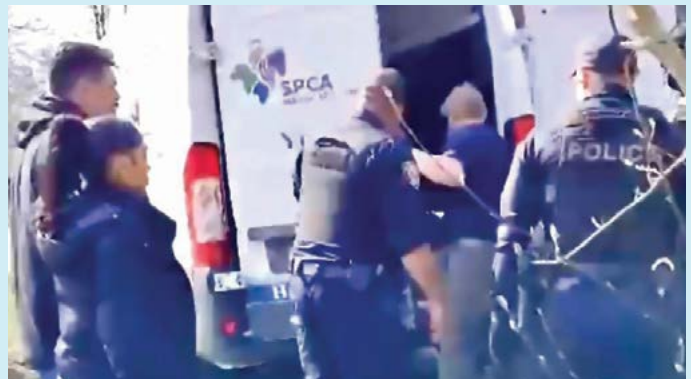
Tony had faithfully renewed Albert's special permit for 31 years. Then the NY DEC significantly updated its regulations regarding threatened and endangered species, which affects special permits for certain exotic animals, with changes effective March 2021. According to Tony, at that time the DEC would not respond to his calls and emails regarding the new regulations. Thus, the non-stop court cases began until finally Tony decided to not continue. The DEC finally dropped their appeal which would allow him to reapply for a permit that the State informed would be denied immediately. **To continue the case would involve at least a year or two and more attorney's fees, plus the increasing notoriety the case was bringing to Tony.**

As reported previously, Albert is now living in Gator Country in Beaumont, Texas, "the largest alligator adventure park in Southeast

Texas". (gatorrescue.com) Promoting itself as a sanctuary for alligators, Gator Country is where you can experience "hands-on animal encounters, educational feeding shows, and unforgettable wildlife encounters" like letting the kids handle baby gators plus a petting zoo. Some "sanctuary."

Whether or not one believes a live alligator (or squirrel) should not be considered a pet housed in an inside enclosure for its natural life, isn't it the point that the State institute protocol to first contact the individual by mail or in-person before sending a slew of law enforcement to his/her home as if they were already judged guilty of a crime? We trust the new DEC Commissioner has seen how (human) lives are traumatized by the heavy-handed acts of her department. The DEC performs vital, lifesaving services which we truly appreciate, but over-stepping their power of authority tarnishes its reputation and is a bad look for a department whose mission it is to protect animals and the environment.

Maureen Schiener is a Planning Board Member of the League of Humane Voters/NY and a member of C.A.S.H. She has interviewed Tony Cavallaro three times.



Erie County SPCA and the police have taken Albert from his home. They dropped Albert along the way to the truck.

R.O.C.K. - Rehabbers Offer Care and Kindness

The Wildlife Watch Hotline - 877-WILDHELP receives hundreds of calls every year from across the country, and a few from Canada. Police departments, conservation agencies, SPCAs, veterinary offices, and federal, state, and municipal offices have referred callers to Wildlife Watch for help. **Your contribution to Wildlife Watch will help us to**

expand our volunteer service by allowing us to cover phones 24/7 and update our lists as new wildlife rehabilitators come on the scene.

COMING TO THE RESCUE OF A FLEDGLING MOURNING DOVE WHO FELL INTO A STORM DRAIN!!

Along with the warmer weather, the calls to our hotline grow daily. We recently had a call from a person who was walking near a storm drain during a rainstorm and heard chirping. She peered down through the grating and saw a mourning dove fledgling in quite a predicament. But, how could she help? This incredible rescue is a blueprint for anyone who needs to scoop up a baby bird from a storm drain, and then find his or her mother.

The rehabber would like to stay anonymous, but we are so grateful to her for what she has done and for sharing her technique. First, she used a pole with a net attached to scoop the baby out of the storm drain. Once he was out, the next challenge was to find the fledgling's Mom.

So, the rehabber played the call of both the mother and the youngster, which immediately drew in the mother.

Here is a YouTube link to the sounds a baby mourning dove makes:

[Baby Mourning Dove with No Mom is Yelling for Food](#)

And, here's another link to the sound of an adult mourning dove:

[Mourning Dove Call and Cooing Sound #shorts #calming #birdcall #birds #backyardwildlife #viral](#)

We hope that you make use of these sounds if you ever find a fledgling. Of course, you'll have to know the species, and a way to find that is by downloading the "Merlin Bird ID" app. It's chock full of great features.



Photo of the fledgling mourning dove.

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Anne Muller, *Editor*

We welcome letters/articles/
photos for consideration.

Contributions are
tax-deductible.

WILDLIFE WATCH NEEDS YOU!

Wildlife Watch needs your help more than ever to continue providing our vital wildlife hotline service to the public. We receive calls from across the country, and occasionally from Canada, from people needing help with injured and orphaned wildlife. Our easy to remember number **877WILDHELP** is recommended by veterinary offices, SPCAs, and law enforcement agencies. Additionally, we publish the **Wildlife Watch Binocular** to inform the public about environmental impacts on wild animals, to highlight people who help them, to promote wildlife watching, and to engender understanding that all animals are individuals deserving of kinder treatment.

Will you help our
work? **YES**

wildwatch.org/join/contrib

LET'S GO WILDLIFE WATCHING

THE BASHAKILL IN WURTSBORO, NY

By *Logan Lapointe*



Photo by Mark Olsen on [Unsplash](https://www.unsplash.com)

The Bashakill: A quiet, lush, and pristine location for a Sunday morning kayak and birdwatch. If you've never been, this spot is soon to be one of your favorites.

Located in Wurtsboro, NY, just across from Bashakill Vinyards, your day couldn't be more ideal.

Pack your paddling gear, sunscreen, and binoculars, and you're set to go.

Upon entering the BashaKill, you'll be welcomed by freshly blossomed, bright yellow, water lilies; their beauty is worth admiring. This first section of paddle is your entry to the larger vein of the Bashakill. You can make a choice to continue left (west facing) or right (east facing), definitely go left! The right is lovely, but the left is unmatched.

Wildflowers, turtles, and birds will guide you along this curvy and wide landscape. The vastness of the view is breathtaking, and you'll wonder if you're still in Ulster County.

While paddling, you may see several other kayakers; this spot attracts respectful wildlife watchers, such as yourself, so you're sure to meet others with a polite "hello." If you're there during the week, you might find yourself alone to enjoy the tranquility.

There is one bald eagle nest but, while clearly visible, you have to know what you're looking for. About 20 minutes in, if you take the initial left (west-facing), there will be a set of large shade trees on your right. This set of trees houses a large eagle nest, directly adjacent to the water's edge.

Bald eagles are sure to be seen during every kayak here, along with those of many other species. **An interesting fact is that bald eagles use the same nest year after year, continuously adding to it, making it even larger and grander than the year before. Some nests have been reused for over 30 years!**

This trip will take you roughly 1-3 hours, depending on how much time you take to relax. It is recommended to wear a sun hat if sun is in the forecast! To learn more about bald eagles, visit: <https://iere.org/what-is-the-nesting-behavior-of-the-bald-eagle/>

Happy paddling!



Logan Lapointe is an avid hiker, climber, kayaker, and nature lover, including insects.



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WHITE-TAILED DEER: *ODOCOILEUS VIRGINIANUS*

by Barry Kent MacKay



Painting © Barry Kent MacKay

There is, I suspect, no North American mammal more studied, more written about, or more capable of evoking such a wide range of opinions—both positive and negative—than the White-tailed Deer.

A few years ago, I encountered a fawn of about the same age as ones I had seen in a freezer, but happily alive, in a woodlot, standing in

oddly filtered light that reminded me of a scene from *Fantasia*. That moment provided the final inspiration to paint deer.

Their diet is primarily plant-based and remarkably varied, including items such as cacti, poison ivy, and even fungi that are toxic to humans. However, they are opportunistic and have been known to consume small animals such as nestling birds or mice, as well as chewing on bones for minerals. They readily feed on agricultural crops—hay, grasses, white clover, legumes, fruits, nuts, gourds—and are particularly fond of garden plants such as hostas.

A word of caution: *White-tailed Deer fawns are cared for by the doe but are not constantly attended. A seemingly abandoned fawn is almost certainly not orphaned and should not be “rescued” unless in immediate danger—and even then, they should only be moved a short distance. The mother is almost always nearby, remaining out of sight.*

*To be placed on Barry’s email list, please contact: **Barry Kent MacKay**, Bird Artist, Illustrator, Studio: (905) 472 9731, <https://fineartamerica.com/profiles/barry-mackay> mimus@sympatico.ca*