Crocodiles in the Philippines

There are two types of crocodiles that thrive in the Philippines – the endangered and endemic Mindoro crocodile (Crocodylus mindorensis) and the saltwater crocodile (Crocodylus porosus). In photo is ‘lolong’, a male saltwater species caught from Magsagang Sang Creek in Brgy. Nueva Era in Bunawan, Agusan del Sur last September 3, 2011. At 21 feet long, 3.5 feet wide, and a weight of 1,075 kilos, ‘lolong’ is the country’s biggest crocodile in captivity.

The Mindoro crocodile (Crocodylus mindorensis), also known as the Philippine freshwater crocodile, is listed as critically endangered in the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species, the world’s most comprehensive inventory of the global conservation status of plant and animal species. A rapidly increasing human population leading to a loss of this reptile’s habitat has been driving it to near extinction.

An endemic species or can only be found in the Philippines, it is known to thrive in small lakes, riverine tributaries and marshes, particularly in the islands of Mindoro, Busuanga in northern Palawan, Masbate, Negros, Samar, Mindanao and in the Sulu archipelago.

It is relatively small, growing no more than three meters or less than ten feet. It has a broad snout and thick bony plates on its back. It is golden- brown in color that darkens as it matures. Young crocodiles prey on shrimps, dragonflies, small fish and snail. Adults, on the other hand, feed on large fish, pigs, dogs, snake and water birds.

The other species of crocodile that can be found in the Philippines is the saltwater crocodile (Crocodylus porosus). Despite its name, it can also be found in freshwater areas such as rivers,
lakes and marshlands. It can also be found in other countries in the Indo-Pacific Region such as India, Brunei, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Papua New Guinea and Australia.

Like the Philippine crocodile, the saltwater crocodile is also in danger of extinction in the country because of loss of habitat as well as the high demand for its skin, which has fewer bony plates and an intricate pattern of scales on its belly. The sale of crocodile skin and by-products require permits from the DENR.

The saltwater crocodile is bigger than the Philippine crocodile, growing up to seven meters or 30 feet. Young crocodiles eat insects, amphibians, crustaceans and fish. Adults can potentially eat animals such as monkeys, pigs, birds, cattle, bats, and even sharks. They have also been known to attack humans who enter their territory. They like to bask in the sun or swim in the water, and prefer to hunt at night.

In the Philippines, the former Crocodile Farming Institute (CFI), now known as the Palawan Wildlife Rescue and Conservation Center (PWRCC), was established to prevent the further decline of these two species of crocodiles. It was the first crocodile breeding farm in the country registered with the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) of Wild Fauna and Flora.

The CFI was also established to promote the socio-economic well-being of local communities through the development and introduction of sustainable crocodile farming technology. However, when it was expanded into the now-PWRCC in 2000, its components were also supplemented to include a wildlife rescue center, an eco-destination park, and a training center.

The PWRCC, which is managed by the DENR’s Protected Areas and Wildlife Bureau, currently breeds 611 Mindoro crocodiles for conservation purposes, and 756 saltwater crocodiles for sale to seven authorized commercial operators nationwide. These are located in Batangas, Rizal, Tarlac, Davao del Norte, Cavite, Negros Occidental, and Cagayan de Oro.
