

Gando; Iran's native crocodile holds promise for exports, tourism



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The mugger crocodile, scientifically known as *Crocodylus palustris* and referred to as gando in the local dialect of Sistan and Baluchestan, holds a distinct position in Iran's wildlife scene. As the sole crocodile species native to freshwater habitats in the country, it occupies a unique ecological niche. Within Iran's southeastern province of Sistan and Baluchestan, the mugger crocodile reigns as a medium-sized reptile, taking the crown as the largest reptile within the nation. Its presence is particularly prominent in the Chabahar port city and various parts of the province, presenting opportunities for economic development and tourism. The species' origins can be traced back to the Sarbaz River in Iran, sharing its range with India and Bangladesh. While a precise census on the number of gando in Sistan and Baluchestan remains unavailable,

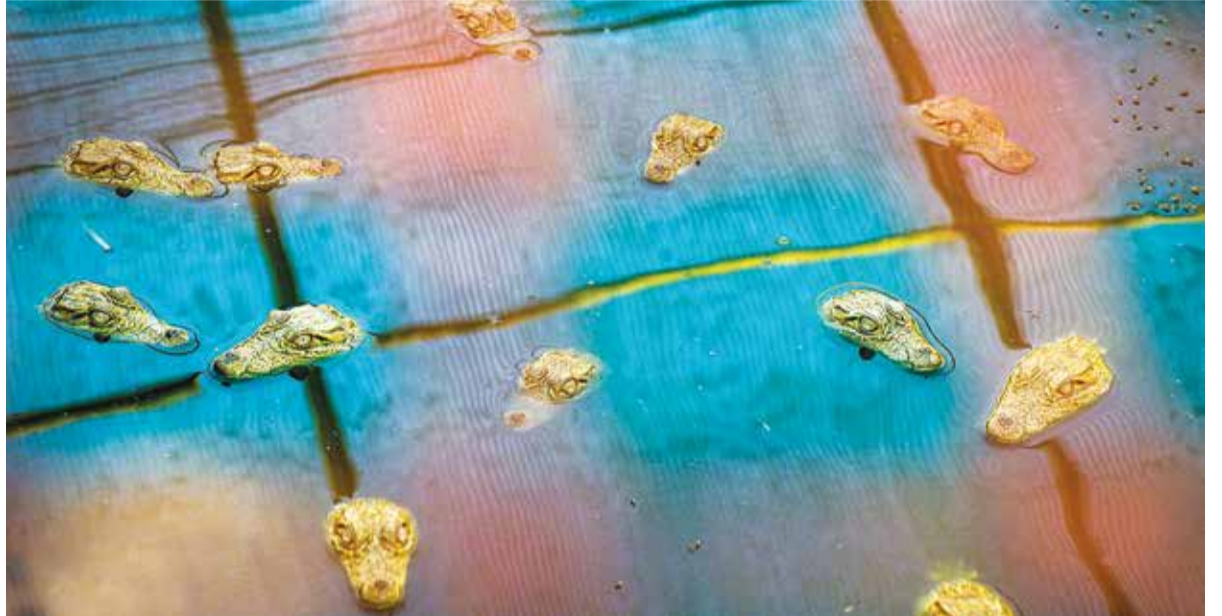
the population is considered substantial, not only in the province but also across neighboring countries. At present, the species is not classified as endangered due to its abundance.

The crocodile type is characterized by its relatively smaller size and short snout. In comparison to its South American counterparts, which can reach astonishing lengths of 6 to 8 meters, and sometimes even up to 12 meters, the gando's length rarely exceeds 4 or 5 meters.

The mugger crocodile has earned a reputation for its shy and non-aggressive demeanor, except during the egg-laying season when it becomes fiercely protective. It maintains a safe distance from humans and other animals, avoiding unnecessary interactions whenever possible.

In recent years, Sistan and Baluchestan province has experienced a surge in drought, as noted by Farhad Saleh-Zahi, an environmental expert in the Chabahar Free Zone. Despite warnings against approaching the Sarbaz River, certain villagers acting as water harvesters have risked venturing near it. Tragically, this has led to reports of gando attacks on locals in the region.

While gando's primary diet consists of birds, fish, and small mammals, observations have revealed that these crocodiles may also target cattle, driven by the scarcity of food as they approach the Sarbaz River to quench their thirst.



Gando breeding

Saleh-Zahi brings attention to the breeding of gando, highlighting the existence of a sole breeding center spanning an area of about 5,000 square meters in the Chabahar Free Zone, Sistan and Baluchestan Province. Established in 2018, this breeding farm obtained a pair of gando from the environment and has since obtained a population of 120 specimens. With the ongoing egg-laying season, an upsurge in the gando population at the center is anticipated.

The gando at the center ranges in age from four to five months, with a potential lifespan of up to 40 years. The oldest members of the center are the original progenitor pair. In their natural habitats, gando typically have shorter lifespans, but under favorable

breeding conditions, they can live up to 60 years or more.

As for the objectives of the gando breeding center, Saleh-Zahi emphasizes that a primary goal is to reintroduce gando crocodiles into their natural habitats. Additionally, some of the gando raised at the center are intended for export to Southeast Asian countries. However, the production capacity of the center has not yet met the required level for exportation. In 2020, some gando specimens were released from the center into the wild to support their reproduction in their natural environment.

Gando demand in Southeast Asia

The uses of gando in Southeast Asian countries are diverse, as described by Saleh-Zahi. Some of these

crocodiles are acquired for display in wildlife parks, or to be released into crocodile habitats. Moreover, the valuable skin of the gando is utilized in producing high-end leather goods, while its meat is also consumed in Southeast Asian countries.

The significance of crocodile blood in the serum and pharmaceutical industries cannot be overlooked, and the antibodies produced in the gando's body contribute to manufacturing sensitive drugs, including those used in AIDS treatment, the environmentalist says. Saleh-Zahi points out the potential income generation of the gando breeding industry in Sistan and Baluchestan province.

"If gando production reaches the desired level across various centers in the province, it could pave

the way for its export, thus contributing to the economic growth of both the province and the entire country."

Furthermore, Saleh-Zahi emphasizes the tourism potential of gando in the region. Sistan and Baluchestan province stands out as the only region in Iran where crocodiles are found natively.

"With strategic investments in the tourism sector, providing essential facilities and equipment, the region could attract tourists interested in witnessing the natural habitats and conservation centers dedicated to this unique animal," he says. The global popularity of gando makes it a compelling attraction, promising significant opportunities for income generation and employment creation in the region.



IRNA

Iran's \$20b smuggling empire exposed & battled

Economy Desk

Estimates by the Central Headquarters to Combat the Smuggling of Goods and Currency suggest that the total value of smuggled goods in Iran amounts to approximately \$20 billion. Economic experts and Members of Parliament (MPs) have recently put forth differing figures regarding the extent of smuggling in the country. Mohammadreza Pour-Ebrahimi, the head of the Parliament's Economic Committee, reported that the figure stands at roughly \$20 billion annually, as stated by the Mehr News Agency. As per the law, the sole official body responsible for estimating and disclosing smuggling statistics is the Central Headquarters to Combat the Smuggling of Goods and Currency. However, the last official announcement from the headquarters on this matter dates back to 2019 when the estimated value of smuggled goods was \$17.2 billion.

Nevertheless, recent declarations from officials at the headquarters indicate that there has been a notable 17-percent increase in smuggling across Iran.

In an interview addressing the variation in figures concerning the value of goods smuggling in Iran, Saeid Niroumand, the deputy head of the General Directorate for Combating and Monitoring the Financial Affairs of the headquarters, stated that, according to the latest estimates, the total amount of smuggling is assessed at \$19.8 billion. Out of this, \$14 billion corresponds to goods smuggled into the country, while \$5.8 billion accounts for the value of illegally exported goods from Iran.

Niroumand highlighted that historically, petroleum products and derivatives have been leading the list of smuggled exports. Conversely, household appliances and car spare parts constitute the primary categories of imported smuggled goods.

The estimation process for the amount of smuggling is based on the "Supply and Demand Gap Analysis" method, which is a scientifically endorsed approach by Iranian academic bodies. Through this method, the authorities determine the country's imports, exports, production, and per capita consumption. By analyzing this data, the discrepancy between supply and demand is identified and considered as the amount of smuggling, as explained by the official.

Article 16 of the Anti-Trafficking Law specifies that the official statistics on smuggling volume should solely be announced and referenced from the data provided by the Central Headquarters to Combat the Smuggling of Goods and Currency. Nevertheless, this doesn't imply that the headquarters announces its statistics unilaterally without involving other institutions. Within the Central Headquarters to Combat the Smuggling of Goods and



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Currency, there exists a working group responsible for announcing the estimated smuggling volume in the country. This working group comprises representatives from more than 20 organizations, including the Iran Statistics Center.

What factors escalate smuggling

In the realm of reverse or outgoing smuggling, the allure of the "exchange rate difference" stands as the primary driving factor behind this illicit activity. On the other hand, inbound smuggling presents a different set of challenges, with various elements exacerbating the problem of

smuggling into the country. Factors such as the "tariff system," which imposes high import taxes of approximately 20 percent, as well as restrictions on importing over 2,000 types of goods, the lengthy legal import process, the complex permit system, and the involvement of multiple decision-making organizations all contribute to the issue. According to Niroumand, the fixed customs tariff rate in the country is considerably higher compared to that of member countries in the World Trade Organization and some other nations. It's worth noting that the Central Headquarters to

Combat the Smuggling of Goods and Currency has never advocated for a complete ban on the entry of goods into the country. However, the current situation, characterized by limited foreign exchange resources, has necessitated the prohibition of importing more than 2,000 items of goods into the country.

Huge amount of discoveries

Throughout this year, starting from March 21, Iran has actively strengthened its anti-smuggling efforts and implemented various plans to combat this illicit activity.

Between June 12 and 26, a series of operational plans were executed in collaboration with relevant authorities, including the Ministry of Intelligence and the police. These efforts led to the investigation of 422 warehouses in Tehran's Shurabad district through advanced systems. Out of these, action was taken on 95 warehouses

based on the findings, as informed by Niroumand.

As a result of these operations, suspected smuggled goods worth more than 1,650 billion tomans (\$33 million) were uncovered from the 95 warehouses. These cases are currently under scrutiny and being addressed, with the owners of the warehouses given the opportunity to defend themselves and present relevant documents. Niroumand emphasized that the use of advanced systems has significantly minimized the margin of error in such encounters.

The official further revealed that the number of smuggling discoveries made during this two-week period is nearly equivalent to the total number of smuggling cases detected throughout the entire 12-month period up to March 20.

Despite the positive strides taken in combating the smuggling of goods, Niroumand concluded by acknowledging that there is still a long way to go to achieve further progress and success in curbing this unlawful practice.