

Hatchlings of endangered crocodile species found in Cambodia

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia (AP) — Eight hatchlings from one of the world's rarest crocodile species have been found in a wildlife sanctuary in eastern Cambodia, raising hopes for its continuing survival in the wild.

Conservationists found the baby Siamese crocodiles in a river in the Srepok Wildlife Sanctuary, Cambodia's Environment Ministry and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) said.

The team found the young reptiles after spending four days scouring habitat sites where months earlier they had discovered footprints and dung.

The species was once widespread across Southeast Asia but is now listed as critically endangered by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. It had all but disappeared by the 1990s due to a combination of factors including poaching, habitat destruction, and cross-breeding with other crocodile species.

The government and WWF have jointly been searching for photographic evidence of a breeding population in the Srepok sanctuary without success for more than a decade, the wildlife organization said in a statement.

Environment minister Say Samal hailed the discovery as "such rewarding news," while Milou Groenenberg of WWF called it "a significant finding for the species in Cambodia and globally."

The statement said the area is being guarded by Srepok Wildlife Sanctuary rangers.

It's believed only about 400 Siamese crocodiles remain in the wild, with most of them in Cambodia. In 2017, wildlife researchers found six eggs in Sre Ambel District in the southern province of Koh Kong as they were exploring for tracks, signs, and dung of the reptile.



HATCHLING HOPES. In this image released by the Cambodian Environment Ministry and World Wildlife Fund (WWF), a Siamese crocodile swims in Srepok Wildlife Sanctuary of Cambodia's Eastern Plains, Monduliri province, Cambodia. Eight hatchlings from one of the world's rarest crocodile species were found in a wildlife sanctuary in eastern Cambodia, raising hopes for its continuing survival in the wild. Conservationists found the baby Siamese crocodiles in a river in the Srepok Wildlife Sanctuary, the Environment Ministry and WWF said. (Cambodian Environment Ministry and World Wildlife Fund via AP)



CAUTIOUS CELEBRATIONS. An Indian man brings a clay idol of elephant-headed Hindu god Ganesha for immersion in Saroornagar Lake during the Ganesh Chaturthi festival in Hyderabad, India, on September 14, 2021. (AP Photo/Mahesh Kumar A.)

Festival season returns to Nepal amid declining COVID-19 cases

By Binaj Gurubacharya
The Associated Press

KATHMANDU, Nepal — Tens of thousands of devotees packed the old palace courtyard in the heart of Nepal's capital in mid-September to celebrate the feast of Indra Jatra, marking the return of the festival season in the Himalayan nation after it was scaled down because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The weeklong Indra Jatra precedes months of other festivals in the predominantly Hindu nation.

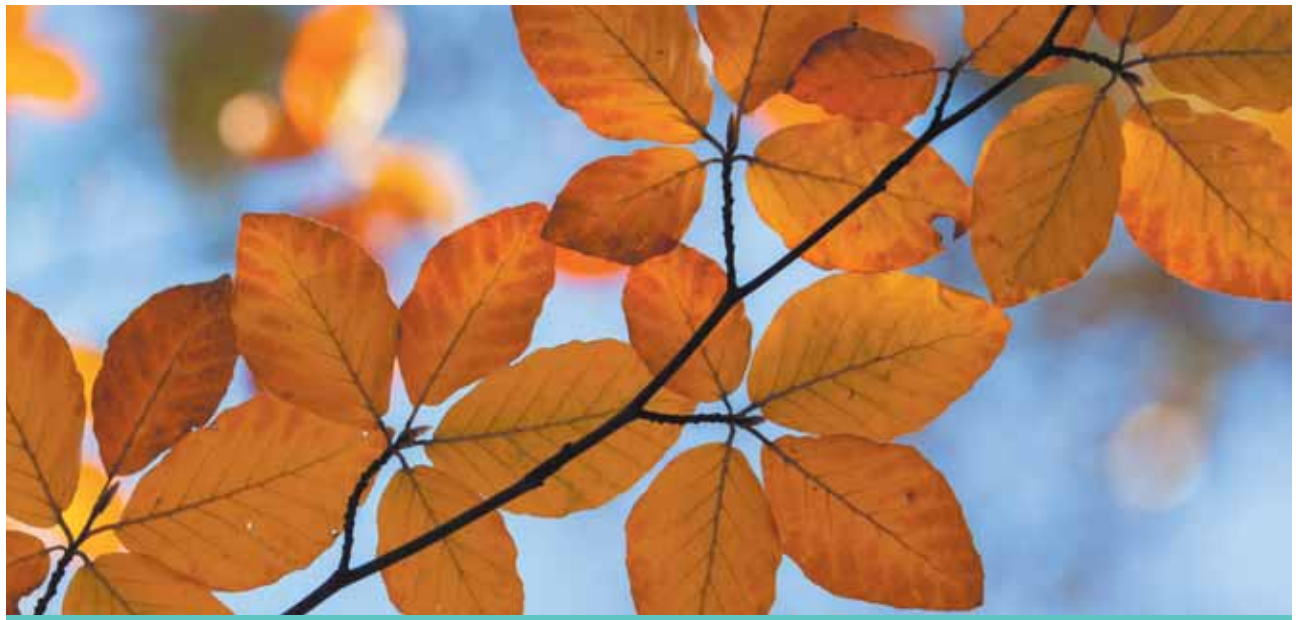
Kumari, a young girl who is revered by both Hindus and Buddhists in Nepal as the living goddess, left her temple palace for the first time in two years and was driven around the center of Kathmandu in a wooden chariot pulled by devotees.

President Bidhya Devi Bhandari and the nation's highest officials also lined up to get her blessing, together with the tens of thousands of others along the short route from her temple palace and around the heart of the city.

The festival season in Nepal falls around September and October. The festivals in 2020 were scaled down after the government imposed restrictions to curb a surge in coronavirus cases.

Security was stepped up and organizers announced plans to control the number of those attending.

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