



# National Environment & Planning Agency

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Attention: All News Editors

KINGSTON, Jamaica

(28 March 2025):

## **NEPA's Wild Adventure: Media Dives into Crocodile Conservation at Holland Bay**

**“Crocs are shy. They stay away from noise, and they don’t like crowds. They get stressed easily.”** Such were the words of conservationist Lawrence Henriques as he sought to allay fears concerning one of Jamaica’s earliest inhabitants – the crocodile. He was speaking to journalists who were invited by the National Environment & Planning Agency (NEPA) to tour the Holland Bay Crocodile Sanctuary in St. Thomas.

The media tour aimed to increase awareness of crocodile conservation, highlight the sanctuary’s initiatives, and dispel myths surrounding the often-misunderstood reptile. The tour featured exclusive access to the sanctuary’s crocodile rescue and rehabilitation efforts and interviews with wildlife experts, environmental advocates, and conservation partners such as the Hope Zoo Kingston and JamCroc Initiative. NEPA thought it important to stage the media tour amidst the frequency of contact between humans and crocodiles in recent times, a concern that is attributed to the expansion of human settlements into territories that for hundreds of years, were home to the crocodiles.

Some human encounters have resulted in the animal being harmed or even killed. The very passionate conservationist is urging Jamaicans to stop tying up the crocodiles and to just leave them alone, adding that, if there’s a problem or an obvious threat, then they should call NEPA. According to Mr. Henriques, when in close proximity to a crocodile, people need to understand that the animal is not a threat to them. In highlighting the relatively gentle nature of the crocodile, Mr. Henriques explains that the reptile is not a social being and is more likely to turn away from humans than to be around them. Says he, “These animals don’t even like each other when they reach a certain size. They tend to keep their distance and have their own turfs. They don’t move in groups”.

He warns however, that people should stay away from crocodile nests, because, like any mother, the animal is very protective of its offspring. As such, he says that people need to be mindful of the nesting season, which, in Jamaica, is typically between November and June. Additionally, he advises vigilance if walking along the sea, near a vegetative area with a watery body behind it as female crocodiles don’t nest very far from a water source. This, he explains, provides the ideal space for the female to take her young into the water once they have hatched. “If you see a mound (which could be a crocodile nest) with crocodile tracks nearby, then these are tell-tale signs that a crocodile may be around and that you should move away”, he cautions.

Outside of such instances when the crocodile is likely to be very protective, Mr. Henriques says that the animal is basically harmless unless provoked. He also advises



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against feeding the animal as this will encourage more frequent contact with humans. “If they associate humans with foods, they are more likely to advance towards people when they see them as they are expecting to be fed”, Mr. Henriques explains. He also suggests that schools and homes in areas where crocodiles are present should be fenced off to limit contact with the animal.

Joseph “Joey” Brown, Curator for the Hope Zoo, who also participated in the tour, points out that it is not sustainable to have crocs in facilities and that Jamaicans need to learn to live with the animal. He notes that the crocs are an important part of our heritage as they have been on the island long before us and are represented on Jamaica’s Coat of Arms. NEPA’s Environmental Officer, Damany Calder agrees, noting that developments must be guided by sustainable practices where connectivity to the wetland system will allow the animals to cohabit and commute in their environment. This requires public education to know how people can live with the animals in their environment, he says.

Meanwhile, Mr. Leighton Mamdeen, who is also an environmental officer at NEPA, believes that people need to appreciate the crocodile’s value to our ecosystem. Says he, “crocs play an important role in consuming sick and dead fish from our waterways, allowing us to have a healthier ecosystem where the good fish can thrive and benefit the fishing industry”.

In adding her voice to the cause of the crocodile, Treya Picking, founder of JamCroc Initiative, notes that the mission of her organization is to promote the coexistence of people, wetlands and crocodiles. She laments the declining population of crocodiles in St. Thomas and lauds the work of Henriques and his facility in saving the creature.

Since its establishment in March 2019, the Holland Bay Crocodile Sanctuary has been at the forefront of crocodile conservation, offering a refuge for rescued crocodiles while educating the public about the species' importance in the ecosystem. The sanctuary plays a critical role in the rescue, rehabilitation, and reintroduction of the reptile into protected wetlands. Fitted with solar panels and water tanks, the self-sufficient crocodile haven was constructed with financing from Global Wildlife Conservation/ReWild; however, current funding is insufficient in maintaining its operation. Mr. Henriques discloses that he uses his own resources to support the sanctuary, with occasional funding coming from Gatorland Global and an annual stipend from NEPA. Support is also provided by the Hope Zoo and Caribbean Broilers (CB) Chicken. The Holland Bay sanctuary currently houses approximately 25 crocodiles, with numbers fluctuating as rescues and releases occur.

**Photo 1:** Interviews underway. Leighton Mamdeen, Damany Calder (NEPA), Lawrence Henriques (centre), Joseph “Joey” Brown, Hope Zoo Kingston and Treya Picking, JamCroc Initiative (L-R) Credit: Avoy Morgan, NEPA



**Photo 2:** Lawrence Henriques showcasing some of the features of the Holland Bay Crocodile Sanctuary to media representatives. Credit: Avoy Morgan, NEPA



**Photo 3:** A crocodile in its natural habitat. Credit: Avoy Morgan, NEPA





**Photo 4:** Lawrence Henriques, Operator, Holland Bay Crocodile Sanctuary giving fun facts about the American Crocodile. Credit: Avoy Morgan, NEPA



-30-

For further information please contact:



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