

Observations on Nesting Activity of Caimans at Two Ponds in the South Rupununi Savannah, Guyana

I live in the South Rupununi Savannahs. Average annual rainfall at Mountain Point is about 111 cm, most of which occurs from April-May to September and followed by a long dry season. The vegetation in the area is generally xerophytic. Not far from my house, about 200 m away, are two ponds: one is about 150 m in diameter and about 1.5 m deep and a second larger one is about 355 m in diameter and about 3.5 m deep. About three km away is the Sawariwau River where caimans, Black and Spectacled, are known to be present.

I have been living in this area for 28 years. I have one confirmed sighting of a Black Caiman at my location and I have seen another species, probably a Spectacled Caiman. Although I had noted caimans in the ponds, I had not seen signs of egg-laying. In November, 2000 I found one caiman egg in a sandy depression on the banks of the smaller pond and about 10 baby caimans in the

pond, but the parents were not seen.

In November, 2002 about 5:30 pm an adult caiman was seen apparently moving from the larger pond towards a “bush island” which is about 500 m from the pond and about 150 m from my house. The identical observation in time and place was noted on 2 November, 2004. On 5 November, 2005 at about 5:30 pm and at the same spot where the previous observations were made, my dogs began to bark and on checking I saw a white flat object tossed in the air. It was a juvenile caiman and alive. Its narrow head and snout was estimated to be 13 cm, 30 cm trunk (its tail was hidden in the grass) and circumference at 25 cm. It was possible that it hatched in the “bush island” and was heading to one of the ponds.

On the first two occasions I was unable to follow the caiman to its destination. The larger pond is well-populated: 13 pairs of caiman eyes have been “shone” at

night! During the dry season the smaller pond becomes dry, but it takes a severe drought for the larger pond to become dry. Since both ponds are well-populated with fish there is a ready and abundant supply of food to support a permanent group of caimans. However, in severe drought conditions as the larger pool dries the fish die and the caimans disappear. A caiman skeleton was found in the bush island several years ago. Re-population of the ponds with fish and caimans can only be by migration from the

river when the savannahs are in flood during the rainy season. It would seem that once there are caimans in the pond the migration in November is prior to egg-laying in the shelter of the bush.

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