



NOTES and INFORMATION

THE ONLINE TRADE OF FALSE GHARIAL *Tomistoma schlegelii* (Müller, 1838) (GAVIALIDAE) IN THE PHILIPPINES

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ABSTRACT – The False Gharial *Tomistoma schlegelii* (Müller, 1838) (Gavialidae) is an Endangered crocodilian native to Southeast Asia and listed in the CITES Appendix I. Despite legal protection across its range and prohibition on international trade of wild caught individuals, habitat destruction and illegal trade continue to pose a threat to its survival. This study documents the presence of the False Gharial in the Philippine pet trade through systematic online trade monitoring, review of wildlife seizure records, and collation of open-source news articles. From January to December 2024, we surveyed 20 Facebook wildlife trade groups specializing in the trade of reptiles. We documented 15 juvenile False Gharials offered for sale by four traders, mostly located in the National Capital Region. Wildlife traders offered one to three individuals each, while one trader offered nine. Two traders claimed to possess legal permits. Review of wildlife seizure records from 2020–2024 revealed eight seizure incidents involving crocodilians, including one case of False Gharial seizure in a police operation in June 2024. No legal importations of the species into the Philippines have been recorded in the CITES Trade Database since the species was listed in Appendix I in 1975. The availability of several juveniles strongly suggests recent smuggling and claims of legal trade permits warrant scrutiny. This study confirms the continued trade of *T. schlegelii* in the Philippines and highlights the need for continuous monitoring, verification of permits, and stricter enforcement of the R.A. No. 9147 to prevent further trafficking of this highly threatened species in the country.

Keywords: CITES, Facebook, smuggling, social media, wildlife laundering



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