

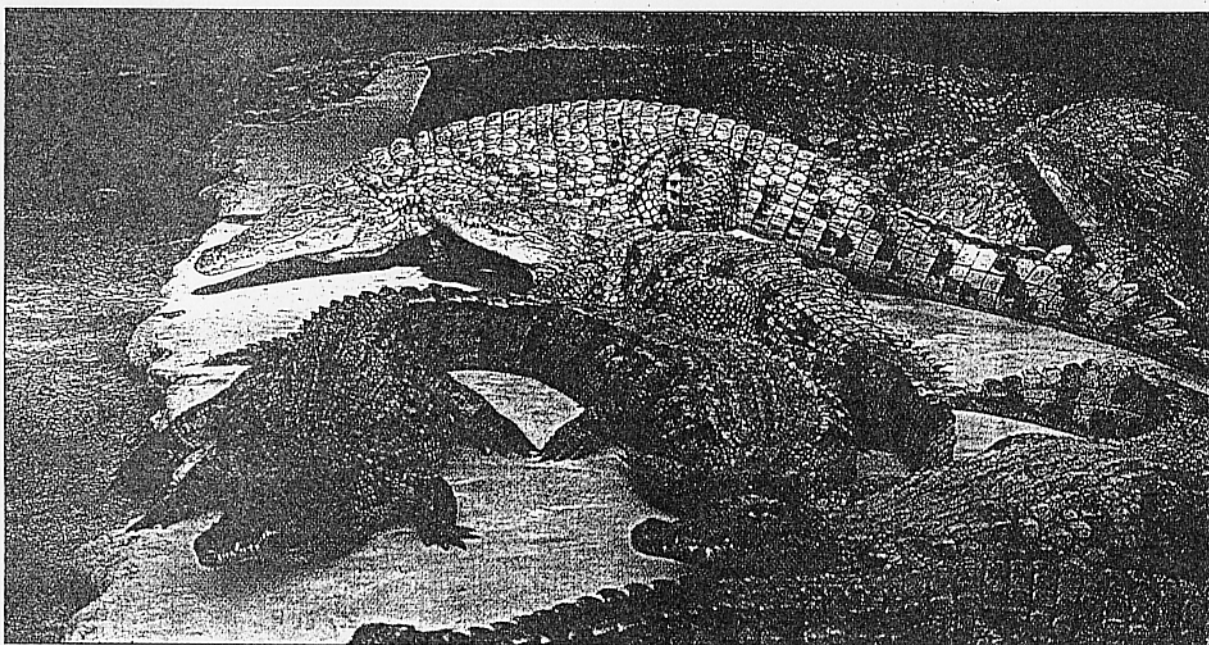
The Guardian

Drying crocodile tears in Provence



Luc Fougierol (left) and his brother Eric at their jungle farm

Greenhouse jungle to repopulate wild



Crocodiles laze amid the jungle splendour of the Fougierol brothers' farm as visitors stare and students study them

Marion Kaplan
in Pierrelatte

A MASSIVE greenhouse in Provence, fed on a lush diet of municipally treated waste, has turned into a tropical paradise for 362 crocodiles. La Ferme aux Crocodiles, Europe's first breeding farm for crocodiles, is ready now to restock African and US reserves.

Vivian de Buffrenil, a leading naturalist of France's Natural History Museum, has been advising two brothers, Luc and Eric Fougierol, who own the farm.

The 4,200 square metre covered farm, designed for both scientific purposes and public

viewing, opened in 1994 after 10 years' planning and preparation.

It has a population of 335 Nile crocodiles, *Crocodylus niloticus*, and 27 South American caimans, false gharials and American alligators.

They are spectacularly housed, with a vivid jungle of 600 species of tropical trees and plants and a variety of exotic African birds.

The Fougierol brothers are familiar with horticulture. Their father was a market gardener and grew tomatoes.

Luc, aged 40, acquired his first crocodile at the age of 14. It was a caiman from French Guyana and became his school's mascot. To learn more, Luc toured equatorial habitats and breeding farms.

The Nile crocodiles, six years old and about 10 feet long, came from a breeding ranch in South Africa when they were six months old and only 20 inches long. "They came on a 26-hour flight from Johannesburg to Nice," said Luc. "Not one died."

For three years, Luc and 36-year-old Eric raised them in a "nursery" not open to visitors. Now the females are beginning to lay — the first to produce eggs was promptly named Lolita. There is also a Madame Thatcher, so named for her aggressive behaviour, and Felicity who is amiable.

The primary aim of the farm is the repopulation of parks and wild places where crocodiles have been hunted almost to extinction. Scientific studies and education are also important. Among the 200,000 visitors a year, 65,000 are students.

The brothers are working on ways of identifying crocodiles. "We want a means of identification that does not detract from the crocodiles' natural appearance," explained Luc. "Nicks in the ridged spine would be simplest, but we are seeking a better method."

Now, with their fast-growing crocodiles, which can live to be 100, they plan to expand their farm.

PHOTOGRAPHS: MARION KAPLAN