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A large crocodyloid from the Oligocene of the Bugti Hills, Pakistan

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Cenozoic continental deposits of the Bugti Hills crop out South of the Sulaiman Range in Balochistan, Pakistan, and they have been renowned since Vickary (1846) for their exceptionally rich vertebrate-bearing Miocene localities. This led G.E. Pilgrim (Geological Survey of India) then C. Foster-Cooper (University of Cambridge) to conduct expeditions in the beginning of the 20th century. More recent expeditions in the late 1990s have reported the occurrence of successive fossiliferous horizons spanning the Eocene–Pleistocene interval (Welcomme et al., 1997, 2001; Welcomme and Ginsburg, 1997). Fossil-yielding series around Dera Bugti document marine, coastal, then fluvio-lacustrine depositional environments during the Eocene, the earliest Oligocene, and the late Oligocene–Pleistocene, respectively (Welcomme et al., 2001; Métais et al., 2009b; Roddaz et al., 2011; Antoine et al., 2013). The most species-rich intervals, at least for mammals, are Oligocene and Miocene in age (Marivaux et al., 1999, 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2005; Antoine and Welcomme, 2000; Antoine et al., 2003, 2004, 2010, 2013; Métais et al., 2003, 2006, 2009a, 2017; Marivaux and Welcomme, 2003; Orliac et al., 2009, 2010). As for crocodylians, fossil remains were initially described from the Bugti Hills by Pilgrim (1908, 1912), but their precise stratigraphic provenance has not been recorded. Most of those fossils are quite fragmentary and they consist of large tomistomine skull fragments (Martin, 2018) formerly referred to species of *Gavialis* (Pilgrim, 1908, 1912). Together with these remains, *Crocodylus bugtiensis* Pilgrim, 1908 was erected from a left maxilla and associated skull fragments of remarkable size found at Pishi Nala. Since its formal description four years later (Pilgrim, 1912), the taxon has been briefly recorded from several levels in the Bugti Hills (Welcomme et al., 1997) but no detailed account has been given ever since. Here, we describe partial, yet diagnostic, mandibular elements of a large crocodyloid recovered from upper Oligocene deposits of the Bugti Hills, which are morphologically compatible with the skull elements described by Pilgrim (1912). This material was collected from a well-identified Oligocene horizon within

the framework of the field campaigns that took place in Baluchistan between 1995 and 2000. We also report a partial mandible collected in the 1920s from Baluchistan but with no provenance data. Finally, we mention the presence of toothmarks on associated megaherbivore remains.

Institutional Abbreviations—**IM**, Indian Museum, Calcutta, India; **NHMUK**, Natural History Museum, London, United Kingdom; **UM-DB-LC**, Université de Montpellier-Dera Bugti, Lundo Chur locality.

GEOLOGICAL SETTING

Pilgrim (1912) states that the holotype specimen IM E221 comes from the lowest beds in the series in Pishi Nala, Bugti Hills. Unfortunately, this information remains ambiguous and depending on the occurrence and current understanding of the systematics of co-occurring ruminant mammals, one may consider its provenance as lower Oligocene or upper Oligocene–lower Miocene (Pilgrim, 1912; Antoine et al., 2013; Métais et al., 2017). For this reason, we consider IM E221 as Oligocene in age. On the other hand, the age and provenance of UM-DB-LCJ1-02 is clearer. This specimen was later collected in the Bugti Hills (Baluchistan, Pakistan) by the members of the “Mission Paléontologique Française au Baloutchistan” (MPFB), in deposits situated in the south of the Zin Anticline, Lundo Chur section, and upper Oligocene in age (see Welcomme et al., 2001; Antoine et al., 2003, 2004; Métais et al., 2009b; Orliac et al., 2010). UM-DB-LCJ1-02 originates from the J1 horizon (lower elephantoid-bearing horizon; Antoine et al., 2003, 2004) of the Lundo Chur section, about 25 km south of Dera Bugti (Welcomme et al., 2001; Métais et al., 2009b).

SYSTEMATIC PALEONTOLOGY

CROCODYLIA Gmelin, 1789

CROCODYLOIDEA Fitzinger, 1826

Family incertae sedis

ASTORGOSUCHUS, gen. nov.

Type species—*Crocodylus bugtiensis* Pilgrim, 1908

Diagnosis—As for the type and only known species

Etymology—From the Greek ‘Astorgos’ meaning merciless or inexorable; and ‘souchos’, from the Greek name of the crocodile-headed god in Egyptian mythology (Sobek); referring to the inexorable fate of animals being seized in such powerful jaws.

ASTORGOSUCHUS BUGTIENSIS, combinatio nova

(Figs. 1–4)

Holotype—IM E221, parts of a single cranium including a nearly complete left maxilla and connected fragments of a premaxilla, nasal and lacrimal (Pilgrim, 1912 and Fig. 1). Pilgrim (1912) reports this specimen as originating from Pishi Nala in the Bugti Hills.

Referred Material—UM-DB-LCJ1-02, a mandibular symphysis including the dentaries and splenials (Figs. 2, 3). NHMUK R.5266 (Fig. 4) was presented to NHMUK in 1925 by Clive Foster-Cooper and is labeled as originating from the Miocene of Baluchistan. However, its precise origin (locality) and age (horizon) remain unknown.

Locality and Horizon—Oligocene of the Bugti Hills, Baluchistan, Pakistan.

Diagnosis—*Astorgosuchus bugtiensis* is characterized by the following unique combination of skull characters as noted by Pilgrim (1912) (autapomorphies are denoted with *): total skull length larger than 80 cm for mature individuals; short-snouted skull as indicated by a rostrum only twice as long as wide; broad-headed skull as indicated by a rostrum at level

of the largest maxillary alveolus as wide as the width in front of the orbits; largest maxillary alveolus is the fifth; presence of a deep notch lateral to the premaxillary-maxillary suture; presence of a deep notch located between the sixth and seventh maxillary alveoli for reception of the 11th dentary tooth; enlarged external nares extending far posteriorly, almost reaching the level of the enlarged fifth maxillary alveolus*; nasals contributing to the external nares; presence of swollen and rugose prominences on the dorsal surface of the lacrimal (not contributing to the orbital margin)*, premaxilla and anterior part of the nasals. *Astorgosuchus bugtiensis* also displays a unique combination of mandibular characters among Crocodyloidea including: a mandibular symphysis encompassing the first seven dentary alveoli*; fused splenials penetrating in the mandibular rostrum to the level of the sixth dentary alveolus* and elevated contiguous large fourth and diminutive fifth dentary alveoli*. Differs from crocodylines, mekosuchines and the basal crocodyloid *Asiatosuchus* in having splenials involved in the mandibular symphysis; differs from tomistomines in having a shorter mandibular rostrum.

Description—The two newly reported specimens (NHMUK R.5266 and UM-DB-LCJ1-02) comprise the fused right and left anterior portions of mandibular rami (Figs. 2–4). In NHMUK R.5266, the left mandibular ramus is preserved to the level of the ninth alveolus and the associated splenial is flanked on the entire preserved medial surface of the dentary ramus. However, the symphyseal surface is somehow damaged and the extent to which the splenial contributes to it, is difficult to precisely ascertain (Fig. 4A–C). The relative dimensions and positions of dentary alveoli are identical to those of UM-DB-LCJ1-02. For those reasons, our description focuses on UM-DB-LCJ1-02.

UM-DB-LCJ1-02 preserves each dentary from the first to the seventh dentary alveoli. Several cracks run through the specimen, the anteriormost edge of the left dentary is slightly worn out, some of the ventral surface of the right dentary is eroded and teeth have been

broken away with only roots remaining in some alveolar positions. The specimen has not undergone deformation and the left and right rami are symmetrical. The lateral surface of the dentary is profusely ornamented with deep circular foramina. They are sparsely distributed and slightly larger on the ventral surface.

The robust mandibular rostrum is slightly longer than wide, giving to it a general spoon-shape appearance when viewed dorsally (Figs. 2–3). Anterior to the largest alveoli, the outline of the rostrum forms an isosceles triangle in dorsal view, while the lateral margins behind the largest alveoli are parallel to each other. The dentaries meet medially from the level of the first to the fifth alveoli. As observed in occlusal view, the mandibular symphysis is strongly serrated and it forms a median ridge, which stops at the level of the adjoining anterior splenial processes. The splenials penetrate in the mandibular rostrum with the shape of an inverted Y-process, their anterior two-thirds running nearly parallel to the outer mandibular margin. Here, the occlusal surface of the splenials is faintly concave. The portion of the splenials contributing to the mandibular rostrum extends posteriorly to a point level the sixth and seventh dentary alveoli. The splenials do not contribute to the ventral surface of the mandible. As seen in posterior view, their dorsal margin forms a shelf in the mandibular rostrum. Below this shelf, the splenials enclose the small meckelian foramen, which opens posteroventrally (Fig. 3C, D).

Alveolar dimensions are presented in Table 1. All preserved dentary alveoli are nearly circular in outline (Figs 2A, B and 3A, B). The first alveolus is facing anterodorsally and seems to have hosted a procumbent tooth. The first right alveolus hosts a broken tooth root, which is markedly curved. The second alveolus is slightly smaller than the first one and is separated from it by less than a centimeter. It is also anterodorsally directed. A two-centimeter diastema separates the second from the third alveolus. The third alveolus opens on the anterior everted surface of the large fourth alveolus, both alveoli being contiguous but not

confluent. The fourth alveolus is the largest of all preserved alveoli and it projects in a dorsolateral direction. Its lingual alveolar wall bulges along the occlusal surface of the mandibular rostrum. The fifth alveolus is much smaller and is also contiguous with the fourth alveolus, its dorsal margin protruding at the same level as the fourth alveolus. The sixth and seventh alveoli open at the level of the main occlusal surface of the dentary, and are about the same size. They are separated from each other with the seventh alveolus possessing a distinct outline along the lateral border of the dentary. Occlusal pits occur on the lateral margin of the dentary between the sixth and seventh alveoli. The medial margin of the dentary tooth row is pierced by numerous foramina of variable dimensions. The largest (about 13 mm in diameter) are observed at the level of the diastema between the second and third alveoli as well as medial to the fourth through sixth alveoli. A single tooth crown is preserved in the left third dentary alveolus of NHMUK R.5266 (Fig. 4). Despite a circular cross section, the crown is heavily worn and no feature of the enamel can be described.

DISCUSSION

Pilgrim (1908, 1912) was the first to describe and name several crocodylian species from the Bugti Hills, including a number of longirostrine forms (Martin, 2018). With these remains, Pilgrim (1908) erected *Crocodylus bugtiensis*, which was later described (Pilgrim, 1912) and represented by a portion of the rostrum (IM E221) from Pishi Nala near Dera Bugti. Although no overlapping material exists to relate the skull material described by Pilgrim (1912) with the mandibular material described above, we consider all these specimens to represent a single species for the following reasons: first, IM E 221, NHMUK R.5266 and UM-DB-LCJ1-02 are all of large dimensions (i.e. skull length estimated over 80 cm; Appendix 1) and all retain characters of the Crocodyloidea, as explained in the paragraph below. The skull (IM

E221) as well as the two mandibles described here independently point to an animal with a remarkably broad cranium (Pilgrim, 1912; Appendix 1). The morphology of the maxillary and dentary tooth rows shares the same pattern of occlusion. Among crocodylians, at the level of the premaxillary-maxillary suture, a marked notch on the lateral margin of the rostrum always accommodate an enlarged dentary tooth of the anterior part of the lower jaw. Compatible with the deeply excavated premaxillary-maxillary notch, the mandibular specimens described herein show a distinctly enlarged fourth dentary tooth that was occluding at this level. Finally, the enlarged fifth maxillary tooth occludes laterally at the level of the sixth–seventh dentary alveoli, where an occlusal pit is well visible in NHMUK R.5266.

In light of these observations, we view all these three specimens as conspecific. The generic name ‘*Crocodylus*’ has traditionally been applied to a variety of fossil crocodylians with a “generalized non-alligatorid-like” morphology (Delfino et al., 2007). The new taxon from the Bugti Hills cannot be assigned to the genus *Crocodylus* or to any members of the Crocodylinae because of the significant posterior extent of the external nares and because its splenial is involved in the mandibular symphysis. For these reasons, we propose the name *Astorgosuchus bugtiensis* as a new combination for the Bugti crocodylian represented by IM E221, NHMUK R.5266 and UM-DB-LCJ1-02.

The fragmentary nature of *Astorgosuchus bugtiensis* does not facilitate a clear taxonomic attribution beyond Crocodyloidea. Although we did not examine the holotype firsthand, we view IM E221 as a large crocodyloid as evidenced by its enlarged fifth maxillary alveolus (Pilgrim, 1912, plate XXVI). The presence of an enlarged fourth dentary alveolus is plesiomorphic and observed in alligatorines, caimanines, and crocodyloids. The most notable character is the participation of the splenial in a relatively short, mandibular symphysis, which extends posteriorly to a point level with the seventh dentary alveoli. This character is not encountered in basal eusuchians or alligatoroids nor in any short-snouted

basal eusuchians. On the contrary, deep splenial participation into the mandibular symphysis is observed in longirostrine forms, such as tomistomines and gavialids, where the mandibular symphysis is extensive and encompasses most of the mandibular length, a condition not approached in *A. bugtiensis*. In alligatoroids, the mandibular symphysis extends posteriorly at the level of the fourth dentary alveolus. In crocodyloids, the symphysis is slightly more elongate, extending posteriorly to a point level with the fifth alveolus. In some extinct crocodyloids such as species of the mekosuchine *Kambara* from Australia (Salisbury and Willis, 1996) or the basal crocodyloids ‘*Crocodylus*’ *depressifrons* from Europe (Delfino and Smith, 2009) and *Asiatosuchus* (Mook, 1940; Berg, 1966), the symphysis extends to the level of the sixth or seventh alveoli. In *Kambara* and ‘*C.*’ *depressifrons*, however, the splenials do not participate in the mandibular symphysis, although they approach it. Mook (1940, p. 2) describes the splenial in *Asiatosuchus grangeri* as almost approaching the symphysis but not actually doing so. The taxon most closely resembling *Astorgosuchus bugtiensis* is *Asiatosuchus germanicus* where the splenials are slightly involved in the symphysis (Berg, 1966, p.57), but admittedly, *Astorgosuchus bugtiensis* displays a stronger splenial involvement into the symphysis, reaching the sixth dentary alveoli. Although the precise placement of *Astorgosuchus bugtiensis* in a phylogenetic framework is beyond the scope of this study, we view *Astorgosuchus bugtiensis* as a probable basal crocodyloid close to *Asiatosuchus germanicus* in light of the following shared characters: mandibular symphysis extending to the level of the seventh alveolus; participation of the splenial into the mandibular symphysis; diastema between second and third alveoli and enlarged fourth alveolus. *Astorgosuchus bugtiensis* differs from *Asiatosuchus germanicus* in the relative dimensions of the fourth alveolus relative to the much smaller fifth dentary alveolus, and in its more extensive participation of the splenial in the mandibular symphysis. *Astorgosuchus bugtiensis* is recovered in much younger strata (Oligocene) than *Asiatosuchus germanicus*, which is

Lutetian in age (i.e., middle Eocene). Although the affinities of the *Asiatosuchus*-like taxa remain unclear (Delfino and Smith, 2009), *Astorgosuchus bugtiensis* will require more complete specimens for its affinities to be assessed.

Total body length (TBL) of *Astorgosuchus bugtiensis* is estimated using mandibular width at the level of the largest dentary alveolus. A regression equation using skull and mandibular measurements of 13 individuals of the genus *Crocodylus* (Appendix 1) allowed to derive a skull length for *A. bugtiensis* of 80 cm for UM-DB-LCJ1-02 and of 91 cm for NHMUK R.5266. Measurements taken on a large series of *Crocodylus porosus* have demonstrated that the skull becomes shorter relative to the body length during ontogeny (Fukuda et al., 2013 and references therein). For this reason, the total length *versus* head length ratio (TL/HL) changes from 1:7 to well over 1:8 for *C. porosus* individuals with a skull length around 60 cm (Fukuda et al., 2013). Using a 1:8 ratio would result in a minimum TBL estimate for *A. bugtiensis* of 6.4 meters for UM-DB-LCJ1-02 and of 7.3 meters for NHMUK R.5266. A TL/HL of 1:8.8 was established for the longest *C. porosus* ever measured, which possesses a skull length of 70 cm (Britton et al., 2012), which is significantly smaller than the skull length estimated above for *A. bugtiensis*. Here, applying this ratio gives a TBL of 7 meters for UM-DB-LCJ1-02 and of 8 meters for NHMUK R.5266. Estimates should be taken with caution but one can reasonably consider probable that the largest representative of *A. bugtiensis* approached or surpassed 8 meters in TBL (Fig. S1).

The estimated size of adult *A. bugtiensis* falls in the range of other large fossil *Crocodylus* (Brochu and Storrs, 2012; Delfino and De Vos, 2014). The fossil record offers repeated instances of gigantism among semi-aquatic crocodylomorphs (Table 2), and based on cranial material, the largest exemplars could be estimated to surpass TBL of 10 meters (Head, 2001; Sereno et al., 2001; Aguilar et al., 2006; Riff and Aguilera, 2008).

Astorgosuchus bugtiensis was retrieved in the same fluvio-lacustrine deposits as the large

tomistomines ‘*Gavialis*’ *curvirostris* and ‘*Gavialis*’ *breviceps* (Pilgrim, 1908; 1912; Martin, 2018). Both of the later taxa co-occur with several megaherbivores, such as rhinocerotoids and chalicotheriids among perissodactyls, anthracotheriid artiodactyls and proboscideans (Antoine et al., 2003, 2004, 2013; Métais et al., 2009a; Lihoreau et al., 2017). Indeed, predator-prey interactions due to crocodylians are recorded on a wide array of mandibular and postcranial remains of rhinocerotoids, including the gigantic rhinocerotoid *Paraceratherium bugtiense*. The jaw of a juvenile specimen referred to as *P. bugtiense* has several large conical unhealed bisected tooth marks (Figure 5B) unambiguously left by a giant crocodylian (compare with Njau and Blumenschine, 2006), as for several postcranial remains of *P. bugtiense*, rhinocerotoids, and chalicotheriids (Figure 5), which would support the conspicuous nature of such predator-prey interactions at those times. Nevertheless, it is not possible to differentiate between tooth marks inflicted by *A. bugtiensis* or by other large tomistomines due to their similar tooth morphology. Presumably, these different crocodylians inhabited the same streams but did not share the same microhabitats as is possibly the case today in India with gharials and muggers (Da Silva and Lenin, 2010) or as previously discussed in various Mesozoic and Cenozoic aquatic habitats where both mesorostrine and longirostrine forms have been described (e.g. Salas-Gismondi et al., 2015; Martin et al., 2016; Souza et al., 2016). Whatever the predator-prey interactions, this ecosystem is remarkable for the gigantic sizes attained by several of its organisms calling for further investigation of the underlying evolutionary mechanisms accounting for increase in body size.

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Figure captions

FIGURE 1. Holotype specimen (IM E221) of *Astorgosuchus bugtiensis* comb. nov., modified after plates XXVI and XXVII in Pilgrim (1912), Oligocene, Pishi Nala, Bugti Hills, Pakistan

in **A**, dorsal view and **B**, ventral view. Abbreviations: **en**, external nares; **lp**, lacrimal prominence; **mx**, maxilla; **np**, nasal prominence; **op**, occlusal pit; **pmx**, premaxilla; **pmxp**, premaxillary prominence; **sof**, suborbital fenestra. Numerals refer to maxillary alveolar count.

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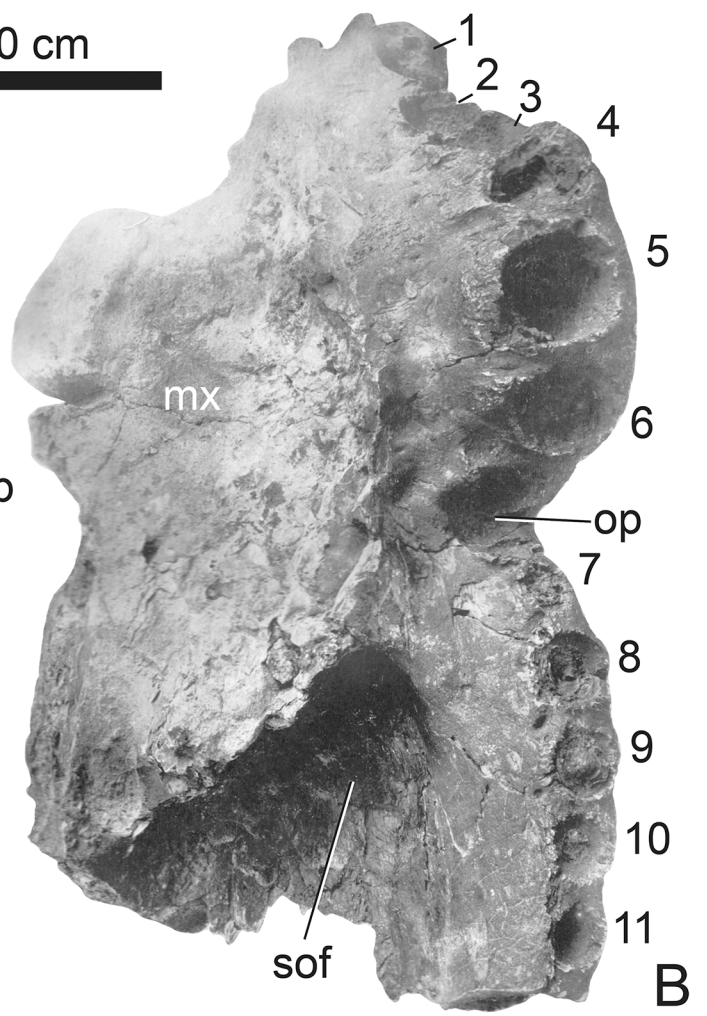
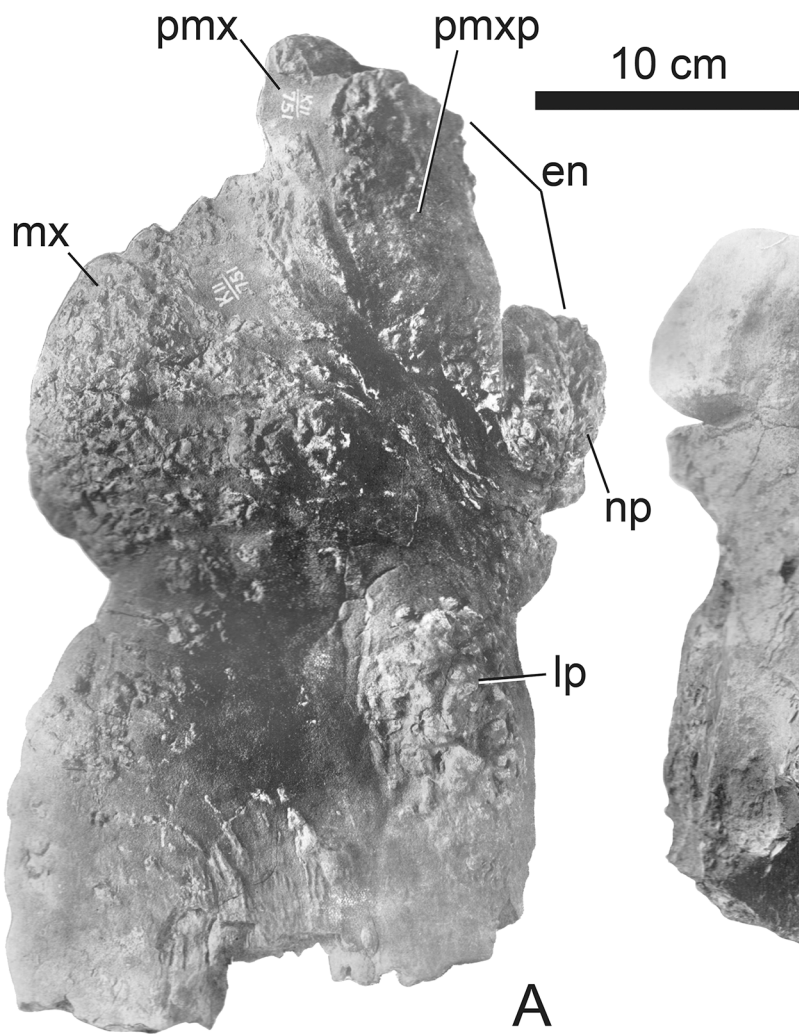
FIGURE 2. Photographs and associated drawings of the mandibular rostrum of *Astorgosuchus bugtiensis* comb. nov. (UM-DB-LCJ1-02) from the upper Oligocene of the Bugti Hills, Pakistan in **A**, **B**, occlusal and **C**, **D**, ventral views. Abbreviations: **den**, dentary; **fo**, foramen; **sp**, splenial; numerals denote alveolar count. [Intended for page width]

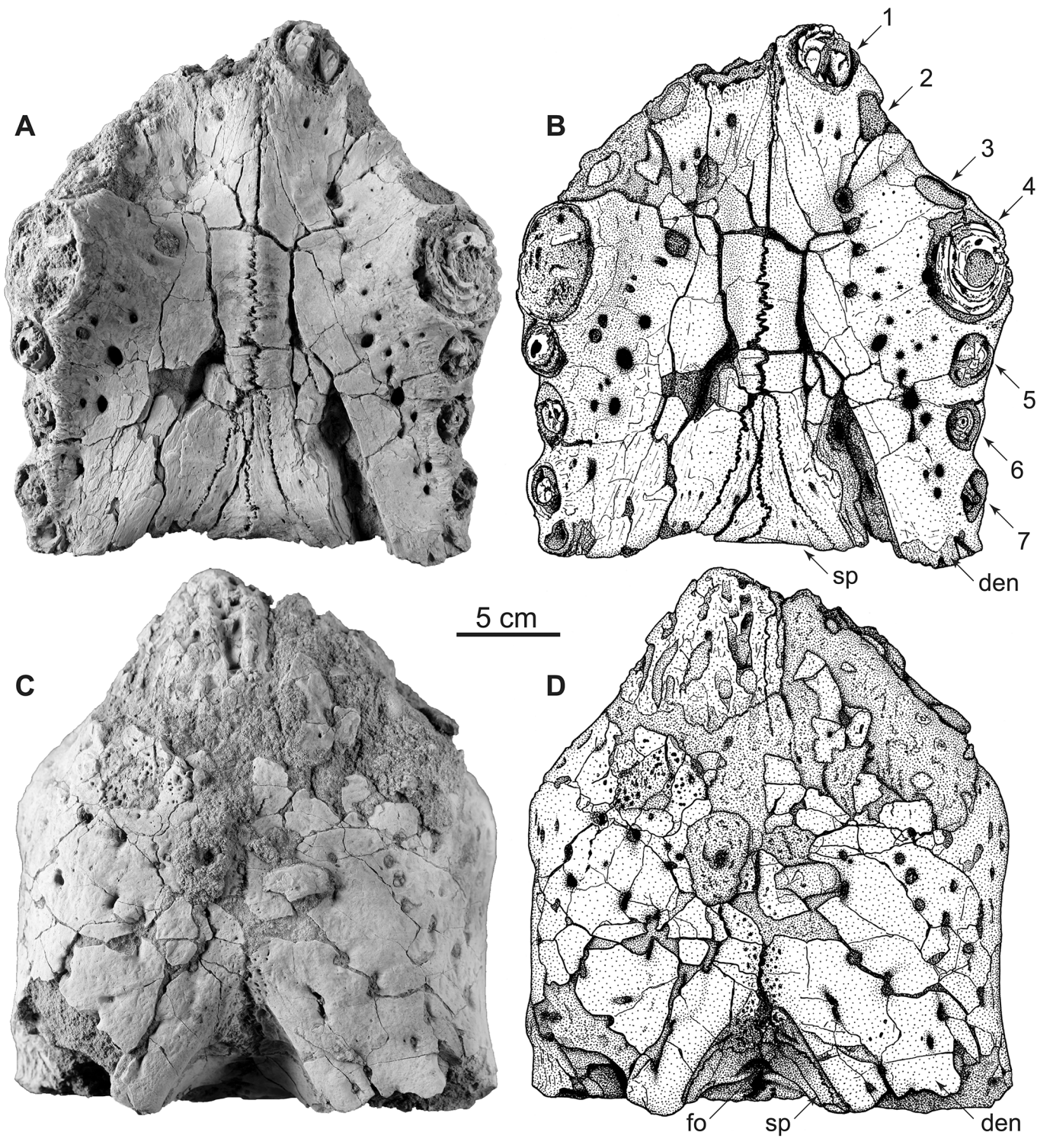
FIGURE 3. Photographs and associated drawings of the mandibular rostrum of *Astorgosuchus bugtiensis* comb. nov. (UM-DB-LCJ1-02) from the upper Oligocene of the Bugti Hills, Pakistan in **A**, **B**, right lateral; **C**, **D**, anterior and **E**, **F**, posterior views. Abbreviations: **fo**, foramen; **sp**, splenial; numbers denote alveolar count. [Intended for page width]

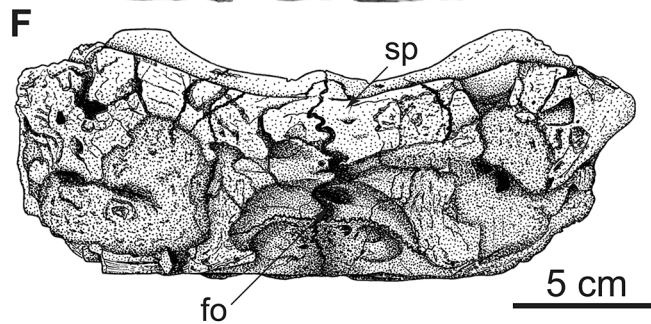
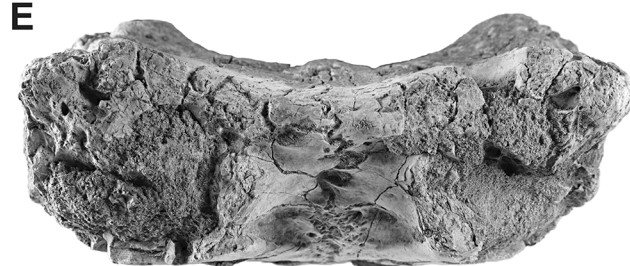
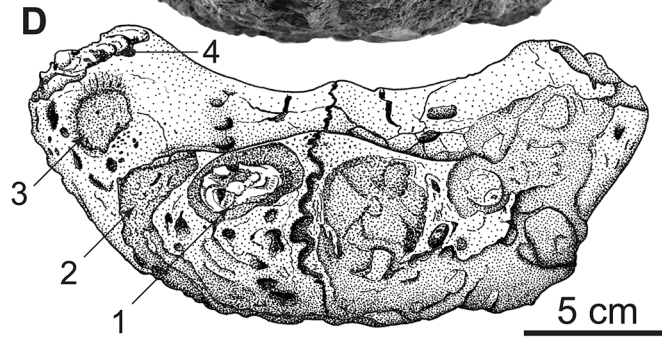
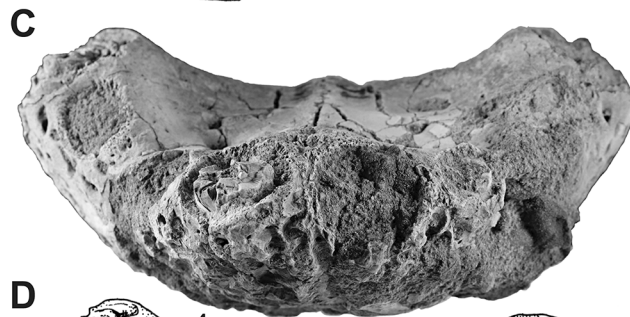
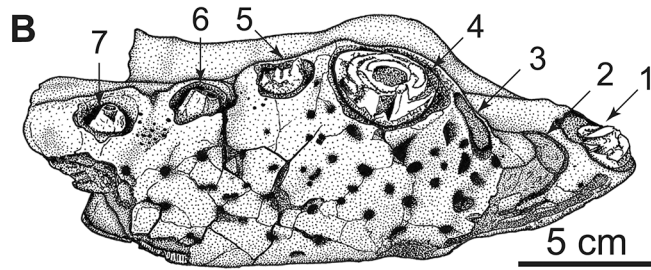
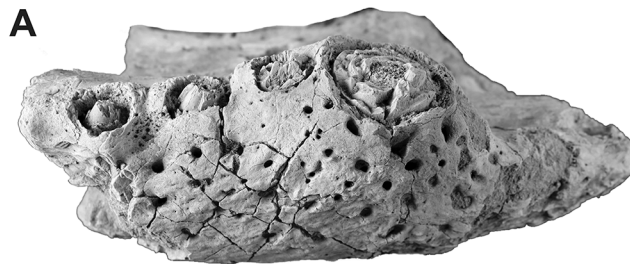
FIGURE 4. Photographs of the partial mandibular rostrum of *Astorgosuchus bugtiensis* comb. nov. (NHMUK R.5266) from the Oligocene of the Bugti Hills, Pakistan in **A**, occlusal; **B**, left lateral and **C**, ventral views. Abbreviations: **op**, occlusal pit; **sp**, splenial; numbers denote alveolar count. [Intended for half a page width]

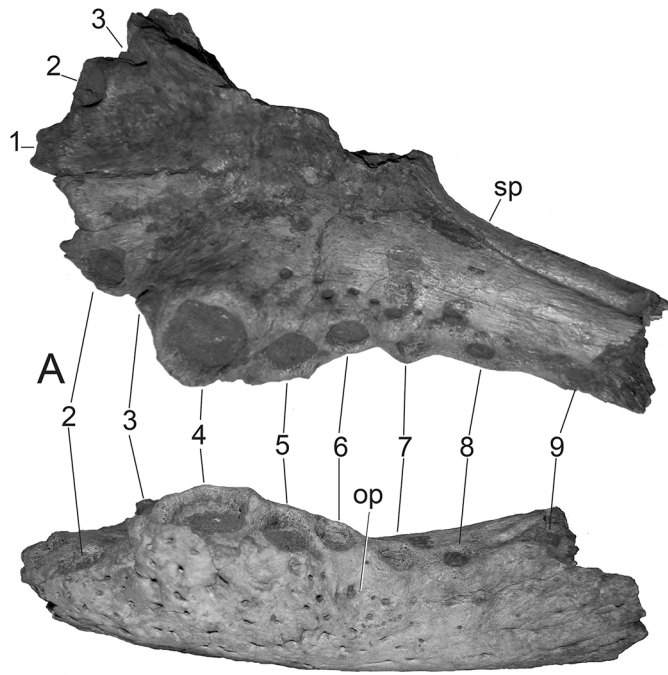
FIGURE 5. Selected perissodactyl specimens from the upper Oligocene–lower Miocene deposits of the Bugti Hills, Pakistan, presenting toothmarks attributable to large crocodylomorphs. **A**, cf. *Rhinoceros* sp. (MNHN-Pak 2221 field-number), distal fragment of a left ulna, in anterior view (DB6 locality, early Miocene). **B**, *Paraceratherium bugtiense*,

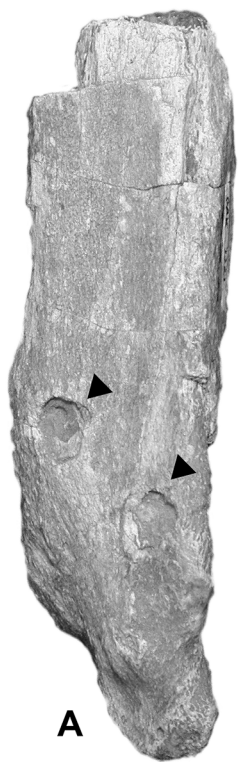
juvenile jaw, in lingual view (Lundo Chur J2 locality, upper Oligocene). C, Chalicotheriidae indet. (MNHN-Pak 1715), fragmentary right tibia, in posterior view (Kumbi 4F locality, earliest Miocene). Black arrows denote crocodylomorph toothmarks. [Intended for page width]



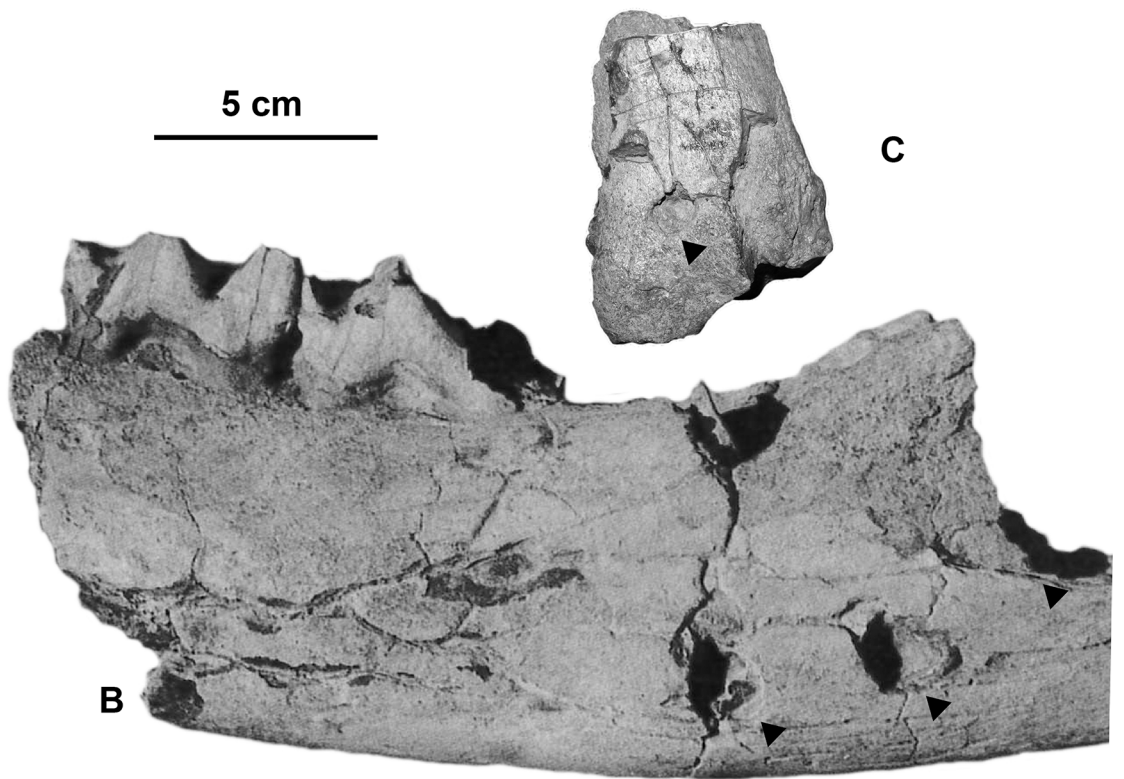








5 cm



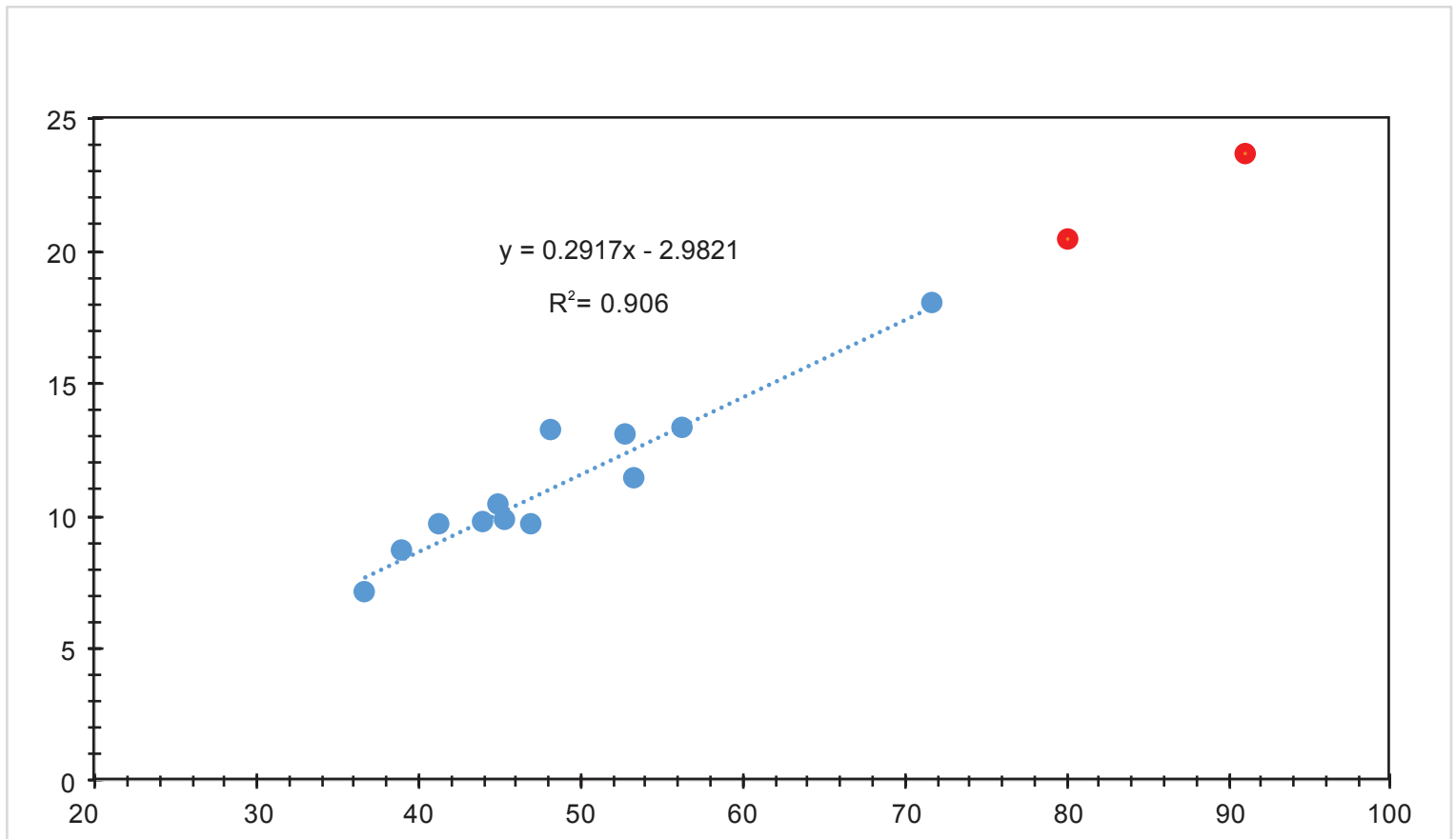


FIGURE S1. Regression lined obtained for skull length versus dentary width (in cm) of modern specimens of *Crocodylus* (blue dots). The equation is used to infer skull dimensions of the two mandibles of *Astorgosuchus bugtiensis* (red dots) described in this work (see Table 2 for measurements).

TABLE 1. Alveolar dimensions (in mm) of the dentary *Astorgosuchus bugtiensis* (UM-DB-LCJ1-02). Abbreviations: ^a, mesiodistal length; ^b, labiolingual length; ^d, damaged alveolar border.

| Dentary alveolus | left ^a | left ^b | right ^a | right ^b |
|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| #1 | 34 ^d | 33 ^d | 33 | 30 |
| #2 | 22 | 21 | 24 ^d | ? |
| #3 | ? | ? | 25 | 23 |
| #4 | 46 | 42 | 44 | 44 |
| #5 | 24 | 23 | 23 | 20 |
| #6 | 23 | 20 | 22 | 17 |
| #7 | 23 | 20 | 19 | 19 |

TABLE 2. Maximum TBL of crocodylomorphs surpassing 7 meters stratigraphically sorted from oldest to youngest.

| Age | Taxon | estimated TBL | Reference |
|------------------|------------------------------------|---------------|---------------------------|
| Early Cretaceous | <i>Chalawan thailandicus</i> | 7-8m | Martin et al. 2014 |
| Aptian-Albian | <i>Sarcosuchus imperator</i> | 11-12m | Sereno et al. 2001 |
| Cenomanian | <i>Stomatosuchus inermis</i> | 10m | Stromer, 1925 |
| Campanian | <i>Deinosuchus</i> sp. | 9.1m | Erickson and Brochu, 1999 |
| early Eocene | <i>Phosphatosaurus gavialoides</i> | 9m | Buffetaut, 1979 |
| late Oligocene | <i>Astorgosuchus bugtiensis</i> | 8m | this study |
| late Miocene | <i>Mourasuchus mirandai</i> | 11.5m | Aguilera et al. 2006 |
| Miocene | <i>Purussaurus brasiliensis</i> | 12.5m | Aureliano et al. 2015 |
| Mio-Pliocene | <i>Gryposuchus croizati</i> | 10.15m | Riff and Aguilera, 2008 |
| Mio-Pliocene | <i>Rhamphosuchus crassidens</i> | 8-11m | Head, 2001 |
| Pleistocene | <i>Crocodylus thorbjarnarsoni</i> | 7.6m | Brochu and Storrs, 2012 |
| Pleistocene | Kali Gedeh <i>Crocodylus</i> | 7m | Delfino and De Vos, 2013 |