

Hello. I'm Jim Tedder in Washington. On today's program, we hear about some children who are learning not only reading, writing, and arithmetic, but are also being told about real monsters that may live in their back yards. Then we are off, once again, to the South China Sea. It is fishing season, and tensions are rising. We will tell you why. The Voice of America, As It Is, and you. What a nice combination!

Of all animals that live both on land and in water, the crocodile is among the most threatening to human beings. And in northern Australia, attacks have increased greatly since crocodile hunting was banned in the 1970s.

Today, wildlife officials in Australia's Northern Territory are working to protect humans from the animals. Their efforts began after several deadly attacks in recent years. The new "Crocwise" campaign even involves school children. The message being presented to students is clear: One of nature's most effective killers lives among them.

Rachel Pearce works with the Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory. She recently met with school children in the city of Darwin. Ranger Pearce spoke about the dangers of the world's biggest reptile. She showed them the remains of a crocodile's head.

One little girl definitely understood Ms. Pearce's message. She said you must not swim near crocs.

"They are dangerous and they might bite you."

Rachel Pearce said that as the numbers of crocodiles increase, so do threats

to humans. She said crocodiles get on land near housing – and sometimes find their way inside people’s homes.

“Lots of people here live on creeks. They have big, open houses. When the rivers rise, the crocs are able to go wherever they like, and quite often they’ll walk up into people’s backyards looking for their dogs or different things. So they are in very close proximity with people here.”

Crocodylus Park in Darwin is home to thousands of these extremely aggressive reptiles. It is one of Australia’s leading crocodile research centers. Charlie Manolis is the park’s chief scientist. He says some animals have been reported to use their sharp teeth to break an aluminum boat.

Television advertising warns of the dangers as northern Australians learn to live with crocodiles. Officials have set up a 50-kilometer crocodile-free exclusion area around heavily populated areas in Darwin and its busy waterfront. Traps catch hundreds of the reptiles each year. The animals are sold to crocodile farms that produce meat and objects like belts made from reptile skins.

In northern Australia, about one person dies from a crocodile attack every year. Most victims are not foreigner tourists who disobey warnings. Instead, they are Australians. Many people have grown up swimming in a local waterway or creek. But the spread of the crocodile has made those places too dangerous for humans to enter.

It’s fishing season in the South China Sea. And clashes between Chinese fishermen and those of their seagoing neighbors are increasing. They are all

demanding what they say are their rights. Christopher Cruise has the details.

The Philippines recently officially protested to China about use of the South China Sea. A fleet of 32 Chinese fishing boats sailed toward the Spratly islands. In May, the Philippines said China had vessels around a place called Second Thomas Shoal. It reported that the vessels included a military ship, two intelligence ships and some fishing boats.

Philippine official Raul Hernandez criticized the presence of the Chinese ships and boats as illegal. The Philippines says those waters are within its 370-kilometer area of exclusion.

“The concern of the Philippines is that this area, this shoal, is really an integral part of our national territory.”

This is the second year that military vessels have sailed so far south with Chinese fishing boats at this time of year. To help its fish stocks recover, China bans fishing near its own shores from the middle of May through August. Then it moves into waters claimed by the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan.

The fishing ban causes special problems for Vietnam. The country refuses to recognize limitation of use on waters it claims as its own. This has led to sometimes violent clashes. For example, Vietnam has protested officially to China because it says a Chinese vessel crashed into one of its ships on purpose late last month.

Li Mingjiang is a security expert at the Rajaratnam School of International

Studies in Singapore. He says the Chinese trips to the Spratlys have been going on for many years – but the situation is worse now.

Mr. Hernandez says this year's Chinese fishing trip may appear to be normal and usual. But he says in his words, it is meant to "aggressively claim the whole of the South China Sea."

Still, China continually has said it has a right to the Spratlys, which it calls the Nansha Islands. And it says that its behavior is beyond criticism.

While it fights on the diplomatic level, the Philippines is also talking severely. President Benigno Aquino has announced one-point-eight billion dollars to improve the military. He said his country will always stand up to anybody who threatens it.

Carl Thayer is a security expert with the Australian Defense Force Academy. He says Mr. Aquino will have a hard time supporting his words.

"Until their force modernization takes hold which is years away, there's nothing much they can do except make public protests."

I'm Christopher Cruise.

And I'm Jim Tedder in Washington. Thank you for spending some time with us on this Thursday, the twentieth day of June. It was exactly 38 years ago today that American movie goers were screaming with fear as Richard Dreyfus and Robert Shaw set out to destroy the great white shark known as "Jaws."

Birthdays today include actor John Goodman, who is 61, actress Nicole Kidman turns 46, and Cyndi Lauper is 60. She is the one who taught us the important lesson that ...

“Girls just want to have fun.”

We hope you had some fun today listening to As It Is.