



# HISGUT KALIBUNGAN

## HURUHISGUTAY 4 POLICY BRIEF

14 May 2021

### SUMMARY

The fourth episode of *Hisgut Kalibungan* focused on the challenges affecting the conservation and management of wildlife resources in Eastern Visayas and beyond. Wildlife experts and biodiversity conservation workers outlined the following set of recommendations to help local authorities and stakeholders protect and enhance wild plant and animal populations and their natural habitat for purposes of sustainable development:

- Conduct more studies on wildlife habitat, ecology, and taxonomy to update existing information and to establish baseline information on poorly known areas of high biodiversity concentration in Eastern Visayas and other parts of the country.
- Explore alternative biodiversity conservation and management measures like expanding existing Marine Protected Areas to include landscapes, and developing locally managed conservation areas.
- Provide alternative or complementary biodiversity-friendly livelihood opportunities for forest product-dependent communities.
- Strictly implement existing laws regarding wildlife conservation and management.
- Intensify participatory and community-based approaches to wildlife conservation and management.
- Build the people's biodiversity assessment and monitoring capacity and enhance their level of awareness of existing wildlife and environmental laws.

### INTRODUCTION

Eastern Visayas is home to a variety of animals and plants, including wildlife organisms found only in the region. Birds like the Philippine eagle and Philippine cockatoo are two of the critically endangered species that are endemic to the Greater Mindanao Faunal Region, which includes Eastern Visayas. Samar *yabnob* and Leyte *tango* are critically endangered plants that thrive only in Region 8. Each plant and animal species in the wild has its own niche that helps maintain natural processes and ecological balance. For example, the Philippine tarsier feeds on insects and smaller vertebrates like birds and lizards. The feeding practice of this near threatened primate helps control the population of insects, which in turn helps prevent agricultural area infestation, thereby contributing to food security. At the same time, wildlife serve as an alternative source of food, income, and medicine. Thus, it is important to protect and enhance the existing population of animals and plants in their natural habitat.

Region 8 is endowed with diverse ecosystems like mossy forests, lowland forests, rivers, lakes, mangroves, seagrass beds, and coral reefs that serve as natural habitat for various types of plants, animals, and other life forms. However, destructive and unsustainable anthropogenic activities pose a significant threat to the state of these ecosystems and the survival of wildlife species. Unregulated wildlife hunting and poaching for pet trade, food, and medicine, among others, continue to endanger wild plants and animals especially those that are endemic and critically endangered. Mining; timber poaching and harvesting; deforestation due to conversion of forestlands to agricultural, commercial spaces and human settlements; and other irresponsible human activities likewise contribute to human-induced habitat loss. At the same time, lack of information about the wildlife and overall biodiversity of Eastern Visayas hampers the formulation of appropriate conservation and management measures. Policymakers and decision makers must ensure that these natural ecosystems are protected from irreversible environmental destruction to protect the wildlife of Region 8 and elsewhere from extinction and to restore ecosystem services.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

*Huruhisgutay 4: Wildlife Conservation and Management* focused on challenges and opportunities in the conservation and management of wild plants and animals in Region 8. Ms. Lisa J. Paguntalan, Executive Director of the Philippine Biodiversity Conservation Foundation, Inc., served as the lead discussant. The panel members were Associate Professor Richard B. Parilla of UP Tacloban's Division of Natural Sciences and Mathematics; Mrs. Ingelina A. Lantajo, Regional Focal Person for the Wildlife Protection and Conservation Program of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Regional Office No. 8; and Ms. Racelle R. Rescordado, Community Facilitator and Research Assistant of Guiuan Development Foundation, Inc.

The following recommendations were presented to help policymakers, decision makers, and implementers address challenges in the protection and enhancement of critically endangered and endemic wildlife and the overall biodiversity of Eastern Visayas:

1. **Conduct more studies on wildlife habitat, ecology, and taxonomy to update existing information and to establish baseline information on poorly known areas of high biodiversity concentration in Eastern Visayas and other parts of the country.** The information that can be drawn from such studies will be helpful for policymakers, decision makers, and implementers in evidence-based and science-driven wildlife resource planning, conservation, and management in the context of sustainable development.

2. **Explore alternative biodiversity conservation and management measures like expanding existing marine protected areas to include landscapes, and developing locally managed conservation areas.** Some populations of iconic plant and animal species are found outside legislated protected areas. Thus, these areas must be safeguarded from irreversible ecological destruction. Protection mechanisms include the declaration of wildlife sanctuaries through ordinances by local government units (LGUs) and identification of critical habitats through national proclamations or through a law declaring an area as a protected area and providing mechanisms for its conservation and management.
3. **Provide alternative or complementary biodiversity-friendly livelihood opportunities for forest product-dependent communities.** Non-destructive livelihood opportunities like sustainable ecotourism, rainforestation, and biointensive gardening can help avert continued natural habitat destruction and unabated wildlife poaching and hunting. Local government units, NGOs, and stakeholders should organize or provide support to these kinds of initiatives.
4. **Strictly implement existing laws regarding wildlife conservation and management.** It is important for LGUs, communities, and other stakeholders to have a full understanding of existing environmental laws and regulations like the conduct of environmental impact assessments (EIAs) prior to the implementation of any economic development project especially in environmentally critical areas. Findings from comprehensive EIAs will provide insights on the costs and benefits of development programs and policies to the people and environment. Decision makers must seriously consider the results of EIAs prior to the approval of any economic development program or policy in protected areas and in environmentally critical areas for the benefit of the present and future generations.
5. **Intensify participatory and community-based approaches to wildlife conservation and management.** With the limited human and fiscal resources of DENR, concerned LGUs, academic institutions, communities, and stakeholders together with the concerned line government agencies must embark on collaborative initiatives for the protection and management of habitats and endemic and critically endangered wildlife species within their areas.
6. **Build the people's biodiversity assessment and monitoring capacity and enhance their level of awareness of existing wildlife and environmental laws.** This can be done by conducting training programs on biodiversity assessment and monitoring, and orientation sessions on existing environmental laws and international environmental agreements. It is likewise important to communicate and translate scientific findings into materials that can be easily understood by people. Making use of available communication platforms like social media can also help amplify the information, education, and communication efforts that are designed to raise awareness of and enhance appreciation for biodiversity conservation. Through these efforts, local communities will gain the necessary knowledge, skills, and confidence to lead their own wildlife protection and management initiatives.

This policy brief has been prepared by the Leyte Samar Heritage Center of UP Visayas Tacloban College based on "*Huruhisgutay 4: Wildlife Conservation and Management*," the fourth in the monthly online *Hisgut Kalibungan* discussion series, which aims to provide expert analysis of the most pressing environmental issues and concerns in Eastern Visayas.