



Grant reference number:
RAF21_017

Final report

Organisation name: Philippine Eagle Foundation

ASAP species: Philippine eagle

Project title: Releasing a Philippine Eagle Back in the Bislig KBA

Period of project implementation: November 17, 2021 to March 10, 2022

1. Brief Executive Summary (max. 300 words)

To date, Rajah Cabungsuhan is one of 8 successfully rescued, rehabilitated, and released Philippine eagles. As of August 30, 2022, Rajah's GPS coordinates indicate a total of 5,556.59 ha covered since his release on November 17, 2021. His coordinates show his flight zone in and around Barangay Rajah Cabungsuhan spreading out to the western side of the release area towards Monkayo in Davao de Oro.

Our biologist and field technician together with the Manobo Simuwawnun Forest Guards monitored Rajah on the ground. The team recorded the eagle's activities using behavioural codes listed in the ethogram for Philippine eagles in 5-minute intervals.

The team established 23 observation posts and spent a total of 252 observation hours within a 28-day monitoring period since Rajah's release. On November 26, the team setup observation post no. 8 on a steep terrain nearest the GPS location of Rajah. And on that clear day at 0820 hour, the team finally had their first visual of eagle Rajah Cabungsuhan perched on a Lauan tree right along the forest edge. Most of the time, Rajah was preening and rousing. These behaviours usually indicate that an eagle is at ease. The team had 6 hours of behavioural observation that day.

By January 2022, Rajah Cabungsuhan has moved further away from his release site and around 13.8 km to Barangay Pasion, in the municipality of Monkayo. With Rajah moving to new territory, we began coordinating with the Monkayo local government unit and conducted education and awareness campaigns from January 19-29, 2022.

From November to December 2021, five observation posts were built and 77 observation hours were spent. The team also interviewed locals to note any sightings of Rajah. But the team did not have a

visual of Rajah as he was frequently moving, transferring from one mountain ridge to another. This however, indicates that he is doing well in the wild.

2. Objectives. Please list your project's objectives and report progress against each.

1. 15 forest guards from local/Indigenous community conducting regular forest patrolling and eagle monitoring – activities will be done 10 days per month for 10 months from November 2021 to August 2022

Eighteen members of the Manobo Simuwawnun Indigenous community who were trained as forest guards joined the fieldwork with our biologist and field technician in following Rajah and monitoring his behavior.

Location estimates of Rajah were derived through triangulation method. The latest coordinates from the GPS tracker were plotted on Google Earth. From this, the team identified where to build observation posts with the best possible vantage of Rajah. During the monitoring and observations, the team used binoculars and field scope to spot Rajah in the forest canopies. Once they find him, they then list Rajah's activities in 5-minute intervals using behavioural codes in the ethogram for Philippine Eagles. Raptor behaviour observation was part of the forest guard training.

In Barangay Rajah Cabungsuan, the monitoring team spent 28 days (November 17-December 14, 2021) tracking the movements of Rajah. Within this period, the team established and occupied 23 observation posts and spent a total of 252 observation hours.

When eagle Rajah moved further away towards Monkayo, the team conducted a total of 77 observation hours in the new area and built five observation posts. A total of 33 observation posts were built and 329 observation hours spent to monitor Rajah from November 2021 to January 2022.

Lack of funds and the rainy season halted our on-ground monitoring by January 2022. But we continue to track Rajah through his GPS coordinates.

2. Threats such as illegal logging, shooting, trapping, and wildlife trade are abated – Through forest patrolling, there will be minimal to zero incidences of threats. For documented threats, corresponding actions will also be taken to address them;

Illegal logging has been rampant around the area. One afternoon, as the team was watching Rajah, they heard noise from a chainsaw nearby. They immediately noticed a change in Rajah's behavior - from a calm state to looking around, cresting, and seemingly anxious.

The team witnessed illegal logging from small scale groups in Barangay Rajah Cabungsuan. It was however, too dangerous to document the activities and the processing areas as the loggers were armed. The most our team can do without compromising their safety is to report to the Department of Energy and Natural Resources Region XIII – City Environment and Natural Resources Office (DENR-CENRO) in Bislig, who said that they will investigate on it.

Aside from illegal logging, native traps are also widespread. The traps are set up to catch other wildlife in the forest. However, there have been instances when the Philippine eagle walks on the forest floor to

hunt and end up getting accidentally caught in these traps. Part of the information campaigns we conduct in the communities is discouraging the use of native traps as it poses yet another threat to the eagles in the forest. The forest guards also take on the task to clear the forests of these traps. They were able to remove about 15 traps from November 17 to December 14, 2021.

3. The eagle hunts and feeds in the forest after its release – Our partner forest guards, field technician, and biologist document Rajah hunting and feeding at least once

The team had only one visual of the bird throughout the monitoring period due to erratic weather conditions in the field. It was a clear day on November 26, 2021 when the team setup observation post no. 8 on a steep terrain with a good panoramic view of the forest and nearest to the GPS location of Rajah.

At 0820 hour, as the wind cleared the fog, they finally had their first sighting of eagle Rajah Cabunguan. He was perched on a Lauan tree right along the forest edge. The exhaustion from days of hike and finding Rajah through fog and rains were rewarded with 6 hours straight of behavioural observation.

Most of the time Rajah was preening and rousing. Both are behaviours which are usually observed when the eagle is well and at ease. At 1240H the bird transferred on a different branch and perched for a few more hours. The team took turns observing and taking down notes of his behaviour. At 1400H, PE Rajah surprised the team as he dove and the team lost visual for 5 minutes then saw him fly up again and perch on a nearby Lauan tree. Rajah moved and perched on 4 different tree branches during the day. At 1628H, while Rajah is drying its massive wings, a Brahminy kite swooped down close to it for a couple of times. The team was thrilled to witness this rare scene. At 1640H Rajah bid the team goodbye as it flew to the other side of the forest edge.

While the team was not able to observe Rajah hunt or feed, they saw the enlarged crop of the eagle which indicated that he has eaten.

All the activities observed by the team and the movement of Rajah Cabunguan based on his GPS coordinates suggest that he has adapted to being back in the forest.

3. Outcomes and impacts.

- a. Please describe how your project contributed to the conservation outcome(s) you included in your application.

Logging is already rampant even before our engagement in the area. Clearly, deploying forest guards does not deter loggers from doing their illegal activities especially since they are armed. These native traps are also widespread but this can be addressed through our partnership with the local community and the barangay local government unit. Philippine eagle Rajah Cabunguan remains safe and healthy. Our biologist, field technician, and partner forest guards help made sure of this so that Rajah will make it to the next breeding season.

The CEPA campaigns and awareness created by the eagle release are effective as Barangay Rajah Cabunguan leaders were the ones who reported a captive eagle to us last April 2022. The leaders

phoned PEF and gave the contacts of a leader in an adjacent ancestral domain where a Philippine eagle was held in captivity. This led to us safely rescuing the eagle who is now in our care at the PEC.

We also recently joined a government planning workshop by UNDP-DENR to identify priority sites for Protected Area (PA), ICCA or OECM and the home range of the released eagle was used as a basis for delineating a potential protected area within the KBA. The PEF was also asked by the DENR to come up with a 2023-2024 work and financial plan for this PA declaration.

Furthermore, The Eastern Mindanao Biodiversity Corridor (EMBC) program of the UNDP-DENR has requested us to come up with a four-year work and financial plan for research and conservation of eagles in the EMBC and we have pitched the forest guard program of the Manobo Simowawnon as a priority for support and investment between 2023-2025.

All these project outputs contribute to the goal of re-integrating Philippine eagle Rajah Cabungsuwan into the wild population. There is also the opportunity to validate the breeding status of Rajah and trapping and tagging his partner, if he is found with a pair, in 2023.

- b. How were your project's results or successes measured? Please refer back to section B7 in application.

As of August 30, 2022, Rajah's flight zone spans a total of 5,556.59 ha. His coordinates help establish a boundary which would likely be his territory.

Coupled with periodic observations and documenting his behaviour with the help of trained local forest guards, we have evidence that he has adapted being back in the forest. While hunting was not observed, he was spotted with an enlarged crop which indicates that he has eaten. This October, we have the opportunity to record him reuniting with his pair and eventually nesting. Tracking and mapping Rajah's movement in the forest using Google Earth and GIS applications can help us infer his nest location. If we see another clustering of his locations starting October until June, we can then deduce that the area is possibly a nest site. This would be a significant success of the release that impacts the wild population.

4. Please describe any barriers or challenges you had when implementing this project, and if you were able to overcome these, what you did.

All projects experience barriers and challenges during implementation. Sharing these, and how you managed them, can be extremely helpful for others facing similar situations and can allow future conservation interventions for the species in question to be more effective and efficient. Therefore, please be open and transparent and provide as much detail as you can.

The rains and fog in the area made it difficult to spot and observe Rajah but the hiking continued. However, in December 2021, Typhoon Rai hit the south eastern part of the Philippines and that

completely interrupted our fieldwork. Despite the shorter period spent for monitoring on the ground than what was planned due to bad weather conditions, our team was able to observe and assess Rajah in the forest.

Aside from the weather, our team also witnessed the threats in the area. Armed illegal loggers were in the vicinity which is why it was not safe for them to approach and address the situation head on. It was part of their training how to deal with illegal loggers in a non-confrontational manner and so they reported the incident to the DENR-CENRO who will conduct the investigation.

5. Were any components of your project not achieved or not completed? If so, how has this affected the overall impact of the project?

The planned 9-month monitoring from November 2021 to August 2022 was cut short to about three months from November 17, 2021 to January 29, 2022. This was primarily due to the poor weather conditions and the typhoon that hit in December. We also needed to reallocate a portion of our monthly food monitoring subsidies and other proposed costs to cover needed expenses for the training of the Indigenous forest guards before the fieldwork, the information education campaigns, and the release activity as some funding sources **fell through**. The budget for the project was also underestimated. Costs were based on a previous fieldwork in a nearer location while Barangay Rajah Cabungsuan is a remote site. In addition to this, weather problems made accessing it even more challenging and costly to do on-ground monitoring. As an alternative, we continue to track eagle Rajah's flight pattern and location through his GPS.

6. What are your next steps or future plans for the ASAP species this project targeted?
For example, include details if the project will be continuing, long-term needs (funding, resources etc.), and whether the right threats were addressed or additional ones have been identified.

In the coming months, we plan to conduct field monitoring and Communication, Education and Public Awareness campaigns in villages close to recent locations of Rajah. And in 2023, we are excited to validate the breeding status of Rajah and trapping and tagging of his partner, if he is found with a pair. We are currently working with potential funders for these phases.

7. Based on the results of your project, what are your recommendations for conserving your project's focal ASAP species? These may be general or specific, reflecting the insight you gained since submitting your proposal to ASAP: anything which might help others working to conserve the species, or yourself in future, be more effective.



It is clear that the successful rehabilitation and release of Philippine eagle Rajah Cabungsuan is an outcome of our collaborative efforts with the DENR offices, LGU's, and local communities. Through public awareness and education campaigns and monitoring activities, we are able to ensure the safety of Philippine eagle Rajah Cabungsuan in the forest after his release.

While we are off the field, it is crucial that the barangay and the local and Indigenous communities have a stake in protecting a Philippine eagle released in their area. This is the only way that we can continue to have a layer of protection for the eagle while it is in the forest. On our part, we continue to monitor his flight pattern remotely through GPS. However, in the case of Rajah as an adult male, it is important to confirm that he is breeding. This will potentially lead us to his nest and tagging his mate as well. The data that this will generate is invaluable in protecting the pair and their nest so that they can continue to produce eagles into the future.

Latest GPS readings of Philippine eagle Rajah indicate he is near Mt. Pasion within the municipality of Boston in Davao Oriental. There is a plan to conduct a nest search expedition next year to locate and document the nest site and Rajah and his pair. If we prove that it is indeed a nesting site, the declaration of the site as Critical Habitat may be explored with the DENR. Such declaration will bolster protection of the area and increase multi-sectoral investment and participation in wildlife conservation. The LGU and the local communities will be involved in implementing protection measures which in turn will benefit the communities in the form of livelihood support or allowances in forest patrolling. This helps in protecting the site sustainably and efficiently.