



**ASAP Grant:** ASAP Species Conservation Grant

**Project title:** Tawi-Tawi: The Philippine Island With The Most Endangered Species

**Name of organisation:** Balete Conservancy

**Target ASAP Species:**

- Sulu Hornbill *Anthracoceros montani*
- Sulu Racquet-tail *Prioniturus verticalis*
- Sulu Bleeding-heart *Gallicolumba menagei*
- Philippine Cockatoo *Cacatua haematuropygia*

**Project activities:**

- 1) Educational poster highlighting Endangered Tawi-Tawi species with a focus on 'flagship' species and the importance of protecting their forest habitats.
- 2) Co-ordination with Local Government Units to initiate the protection through a draft ordinance of Languyan's forest as a Critical Habitat.
- 3) Capacity Development for trainer's training on forest community nursery establishment.

**Summary:**

The project focused on raising awareness of the island's ASAP Species and integrating awareness-raising of these species into the provincial education curriculum. It also worked on initiating a process to establish better protection of habitats critical for the species' conservation, and livelihood support through a community tree nursery (to reduce need to access the island's remaining secondary and primary forests).

The project occurred during Covid-19 and so faced numerous operational challenges. Additionally, a change in local government meant a restart in relationships; accessing the key decision-makers within the provincial government was extremely challenging, only improving after the project had ended. Despite these challenges, important steps were taken to start sensitising local villages, schools, and government officials on the importance of the island's bird species. As many people live on the coast, there is low awareness of the island's interior forests and the globally important biodiversity that these forests retain.



Education and awareness raising activities were considered crucial first steps towards generating local pride in the island's diversity and to building some political momentum towards addressing some of the threats. The Provincial Governor's office and the Education Ministry's office approved, endorsed and distributed over 300 posters highlighting the island's important and globally threatened bird fauna. Progress was also made discussing the education curriculum with the Curriculum Development Officer of Bangsamoro Autonomous Region, which governs Tawi-Tawi. There is interest to include more of the island's non-marine fauna into the state-level education.

Tawi-Tawi island is part of the Sulu Archipelago in the Philippines. Four Critically Endangered species are found on the island: Sulu Hornbill, Sulu Racquet-tail, Sulu Bleeding-heart and Philippine Cockatoo. The main threats to the species are habitat loss cause by agriculture, extractive industries, collection of forest resources, selective logging, as well as trapping / hunting. The island is over 1000 km from Manila, is governed as an autonomous region, and has strong indigenous groups who have a significant influence on land use and conservation. Its inaccessibility and governance systems make it one of the most challenging places in South-east Asia to work in.