

# Management planning for the Palawan peacock-pheasant

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David Lee 2006

WPA and Manchester Metropolitan University are working with local partners to implement the project *Managing threats to key birds in the Palawan corridor: capacity building through applied research*. The local partners are Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park and the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development (PCSDS). Funding has been provided by the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund which was established to fund conservation projects in the world's biodiversity hotspots.

This project aims to address the acute pressures facing Palawan's forests by galvanising conservation efforts around one particular ambassador species. The Palawan peacock-pheasant *Polyplectron napoleonensis*, which is listed as **Vulnerable** on the IUCN Red List because of habitat loss and fragmentation combined with direct persecution by hunting. By promoting the conservation of this high profile 'ambassador' species the positive management effects will also benefit the conservation of other Palawan endemics and their rapidly diminishing habitats. The first stage of the project has been concerned with intensive training to increase field skills and researching the conservation requirements of the species.

The focus of the study is the Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, an Important Bird Area and an initial component of the National Integrated Protected Areas System. As in many protected areas in the country, management regimes and zones in the

park are largely based on major vegetation types, topography or administrative boundaries. The management plans produced for these sites are rather weak because they lack detailed ecological knowledge, especially of key species and the pressures that they face. Benchmark studies of selected lowland specialists will provide vital information in refining and strengthening the management plan of this protected area.

The project team commenced field surveys in January 2006 and has intensively surveyed six sites that have been subject to a variety of management zones/regimes. Fieldwork has included assessing the abundance of the peacock-pheasant using distance sampling and gathering detailed habitat measurements and understorey microhabitat characterisation from transect and point counts. Analysis of these ecological data as well as collection of socio-economic data is currently underway.

Forty-eight individuals have benefited in training provided by the project: park

rangers, local (Palawan) biologists, Department of the Environment and Nature Reserves staff, undergraduate biology students from the University of the Philippines and members of Wildlife Conservation Society of the Philippines. A significant part of the training was conducted alongside the research activities, allowing key Filipinos (protected area staff and Palawan conservationists) to polish their skills and deepen their understanding of the conservation issues in the park. One interesting outcome of the training is that one of the local biologists who has been trained by the project was hired by the park as its resident biologist whose main remit is to design the biodiversity monitoring programme of the park.



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Land cleared for agriculture

This project is a landmark for Philippines conservation. This is because it is the first time a protected area has taken a serious interest in species-specific management planning, based on sound science, to enhance protected area management. It is hoped that the lessons learned from this will be replicated to protected areas elsewhere in the country.