

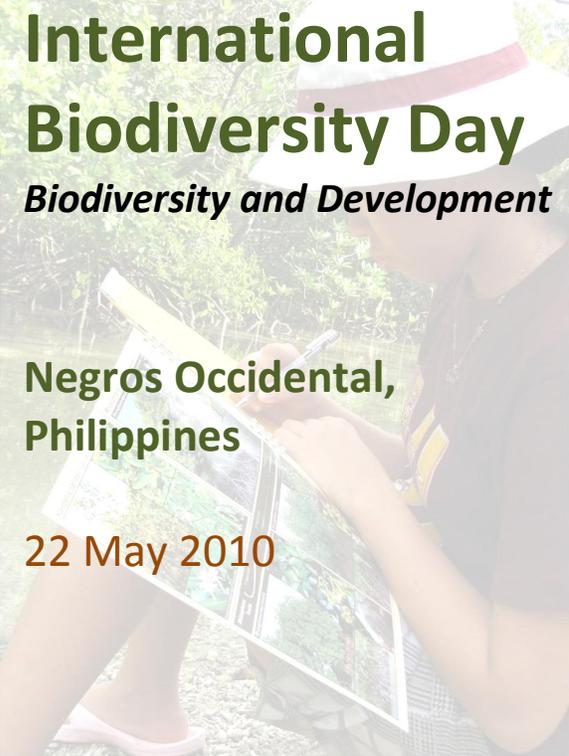


International Biodiversity Day

Biodiversity and Development

Negros Occidental,
Philippines

22 May 2010



A SHOWCASE OF SORTS

Setting the Stage

The **Philippines** is what you get when you zoom in on the center of the world's center of marine biodiversity. Ever heard of the Coral Triangle? It's one of the top priorities of global marine conservation and you're looking at its 'centroid' when you look at the Philippines' gem of marine life.

Zoom in further, and you'll not only get a fine slice of this much talked about marine richness, but you'll also get to see the home of some of the world's endangered species, all of which are West Visayan endemics – the Philippine Spotted Deer (*Cervus alfredi*), the Visayan Warty Pig (*Sus cebifrons negrinus*), the Negros Bleeding-Heart Pigeon (*Gallicolumba keayi*) and the Visayan Tarictic Hornbill (*Penelopides panini*). In the province of **Negros Occidental**, Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), fishery reserves, and forest natural parks are established all over the province in order to protect and conserve the remaining terrestrial and marine biodiversity. So when the province decided to host the International Biodiversity Day celebration for the Philippines, the organizers, led by the **Provincial Environment Management Office (PEMO)** had to decide where to host its biodiversity event and how to share its aquatic and earthly treasures to the rest of the world.

Enter the Directors and Scene-Stealers

Because there was so much to do in such little time, PEMO called on the experts. Who better to invite than groups that have, over the years, learned to roll outdoor education, hands-on conservation, and responsible fun all into one activity – an ENVIRONMENTAL CAMP.

The **Museo Sang Bata sa Negros Foundation** chose to host their camps for teachers and high school students from the northern areas of the province at the **Sagay Marine Reserve**, at the heart of the Visayan Sea, a key biodiversity area in the region. They figured that a 32,000 hectare marine reserve with 33 species of true mangroves, ten species of seagrass, 60 genera of corals, giant clams, and other commercially important invertebrates was enough to explain the true meaning of Biodiversity.

The **Negros Forest Ecological Foundation, Inc. (NFEFI)** took to the mountains for their camp venue and hosted forest guard volunteers and youth beneficiaries of the province's Integrated Social Forestry (ISF) Program at the **North Negros Natural Park** portion in Silay City. Being the last remaining area with intact forest on the island, the NNNP offers asylum to over 100 bird species, 30 mammalian species (37% of which are endemic), amphibians, reptiles, and over 300 plant species.

The **Philippine Reef and Rainforest Conservation Foundation, Inc. (PRRCFI)** decided to keep it close to home and host their marine camps for southern-based high school students and local leaders at the **Danjungan Island Marine Reserve and Wildlife Sanctuary**, where PRRCFI

took root more than ten years ago. This small island of approximately 43 hectares lies 3km west of Negros Occidental and contains a largesse of seven viable (or should we say enviable) ecosystems - limestone, beach and mangrove forests; caves, seagrass beds coral reefs and the open sea. Widely explored and well-studied, Danjungan has been discovered to have 572 fish species, 22 species of rare hard corals, at least eight species of seagrass and 17 species of mangroves, and an assortment of macroalgae, nudibranchs and echinoderms. As if these weren't enough, the island also boasts 70 bird species (including a nesting pair of majestic White-Breasted Sea Eagles, *Haliaeetus leucogaster*), nine fruit and insect-eating bat species, and endangered and threatened species such as the giant manta ray (*Manta birostris*) and Napoleon Wrasse (*Cheilinus undulatus*).

Lights, Camera...

But wait. The celebration of International Biodiversity Day is on May 22. That's just one day. Negros Occidental will need a month, please.

... Action!!!

Two camps started the show simultaneously on May 4, 2010. While 49 high school and elementary teachers were busying themselves with mangrove identification and reforestation at the Sagay Marine Reserve during their two-day camp, 29 students from six localities down south were playing the role of Junior Scientists with five assigned ecosystems as their backdrop. Under the watchful eyes of marine biologists Dr. Stefan Groenewold (DED) and Mr. Terence Dacles (GTZ), the explorers tasked to investigate the seagrass area discovered the Banded Snake Eel (*Myrichthys colubrinus*) which, as a means for protection, evolved to resemble the extremely venomous banded sea snake. The kids in the mangroves played forensics and took samples of leaves from the trees and lain them side by side for comparison, unaware that their adult counterparts in Sagay were examining almost the same species. Mangrove samples included 'bakauan lalaki' (*Rhizophora apiculata*), and the local 'tabigi' (*Xylocarpus granatum*) which belongs to the mahogany family and which, just like most of the kids, are native to the coastal areas. Other explorers ventured the island's limestone caves which is an important habitat for the cave-roosting Nectar Bats (*Eonycteris spelaea*) considered as one of the "Vulnerable" bat species on the island. The participants were also able to observe the Island Flying Fox (*Pteropus hypomelanus*) and Little Golden Mantled Flying Fox (*Pteropus pumilus*) during night time as the bats would leave their roosts and pass above the camp area.

From May 13-14, 33 local (village) leaders from central Negros Occidental took their places at Danjungan and learned action-packed techniques of mangrove surveys. With transect line in tow, the adult campers wove and climbed their way through forests of 12 identified mangrove species. To name a few, there was the Mangrove Apple or 'pagatpat' (*Sonneratia alba*), Grey Mangrove (*Avicennia marina*) and the less common 'lagulot' or cannon ball mangroves (*Xylocarpus moluccensis*). Professor Nestor Yunque from the University of the Philippines guided their way, telling them where to step and how to step. So good were the instructions, local residents geckos and mudskippers didn't mind the intrusion one bit. As a token of Professor Yunque's appreciation for his quick learners, the campers were also taught how to

compute for the Shannon-Wiener Diversity Index as a practical tool for their own respective areas.

Not to be outdone, the May 14-16 forest camp for 24 children of the Integrated Social Forestry farmer-beneficiaries had its own story to tell as well. Once the companions of their hunter-elders, these youth knew the sounds of the local birds by heart, and even knew how to mimic them as a means for hunting. But through past information campaigns by the province and the lessons and activities conducted by the camp facilitators such as veterinarian Dr. Joanne Justo, Forester Dr. Felix Gaschik (DED), Education Officer Mimie Ledesma, and Bird and Bat specialist Pol Cariño, the youth now look at the animals with different eyes and see their greater value as living components of their forest habitat. Among the birds seen during the group's early morning bird watching activity were the White Eared Brown Dove (*Phapitreron leucotis*), the Blue-Headed Fan Tail (*Rhipidura cyaniceps*), the Olive-Backed Sunbird (*Cinnyris jugularis*), the Philippine Tailorbird (*Orthotomus castaneiceps*) and the endangered Visayan Tarictic Hornbill (*Penelopides panini*).

It was the local leaders of southern Negros' turn to try out Danjugan Island last May 17-18. Just like the local leaders before them, all 35 participants were taught survey methods but this group's highlights were the seagrass areas. With a glass-bottom basin (in lieu of mask and snorkel) and quadrant, the adults took to the water and estimated the groundcover of species such as Needle Seagrass (*Halodule pinifolia*), tropical seagrass *Enhalus acoroides* and Sickle Seagrass (*Thalassia hemprichii*). Other island vegetation included plants like Screw Pines (*Pandanus spp.*), Christmas Tree Palms (*Veitchia merrily*) and the threatened mangrove Philippine Bantigue (*Pemphis acidula*).

The Marine camp held at the Sagay Marine Reserve and the Museo sang Bata sa Negros (Children's Museum), last May 20-21 catered to 43 high school students from northern Negros. Hands-on activities, including a visit to a children's museum and snorkelling at Carbin Reef, familiarized the kids with starfishes (*Protoreaster nodosus* and *Linckia laevigata*), mangroves (*Rhizophora apiculata*) and shellfish including the Tiger Cowry (*Cypraea tigris*), whose shells were one of the many remains washed ashore at Carbin Reef. The campers also enjoyed their snorkelling activities at the Giant Clam Garden of the reserve, where they saw several endangered Giant clams such as *Tridacna gigas*, *Tridacna squamosa* and *Hippopus hippopus* amidst the corals and fishes of the reserve. The participants also identified several bird species during their bird watching exercise namely: the threatened scrub fowl "Tabon Bird" (*Megapodius cumingii*), Black Naped Orioles (*Oriolus chinensis*), Pied Fan Tails (*Rhipidura javanica*), Asian Glossy Starlings (*Aplonis panayensis*), Olive Backed Sun Birds (*Nectarinia jugularis*), White Collared Kingfishers (*Halcyon chloris*) and the fruit doves such as the Imperial Fruit Dove (*Ducula aenea*), and the Pinked Neck Green Pigeon (*Treron vernans*).

And finally, just as the IBD Launch drew closer, 45 forest guard volunteers and local leaders had their share of learning at the Northern Negros Natural Park in Silay City from May 20-22. For this camp, one of the main highlights was the assessment of the current park management policies and the patrolling and monitoring activities of the forest guard volunteers. Going beyond species assessments, conservation issues were identified and ways to improve the current situation in their respective areas were suggested. As a result, the group came up with a

Conservation Needs Assessment Matrix identifying different issues with their corresponding activities, target date, persons responsible and to whom or what type of agencies and/or organization they deem appropriate to collaborate with.

Supporting Cast:

Now how to share Negros Occidental's biodiversity and the work various groups have been putting in to conserve it, with the rest of the province? Hold a week-long exhibit and launch a children's environmental book and a Philippine spotted deer mascot, while you're at it.

From May 17-21, a **Biodiversity Exhibit** was held at the Event Centre of the SM City Bacolod (one of the malls in Bacolod City). What better way to raise public awareness than holding an exhibit at the 'center' of city life. More than 900 guests visited the exhibit which was contributed by various NGOs, German development organizations (GTZ, DED, Weltwärts, KfW) and the Provincial Environment Management Office. Exhibits included shell collections, the IBD photo contest entries, posters and tarpaulins of on-going conservation efforts by various groups and film showing on biodiversity. The **IBD Mascot "Spotty"** (for the endangered Philippine Spotted Deer, *Cervus alfredi*), a Keystone species of the Western Visayas Faunal Region) was launched and toured around the mall to invite kids and the general public to the book launch of a children's environmental book "**Where is My Home**" translated in the local dialect. Book reading activities by student and provincial staff volunteers lasted throughout the week-long exhibit.

The Final Cut

As if the camps and exhibit weren't enough, the province hosted one last celebration. May 22, 2010 will go down in Negros Occidental history as the single busiest day dedicated to biodiversity. The IBD began with a **foot parade** around key public areas within Bacolod City. Roughly more than 500, the participants included local government representatives, various government agencies including the Department of Environment and Natural Resources and the Philippine National Police, various provincial government offices, NGOs, schools, participants to the IBD photo and canvass painting contests and partners from the IBD environmental camps. Led by Spotty, all the paraders wore their own animal hats, costumes and props to make sure people knew this was a biodiversity event. The IBD **on-the-spot Canvass Painting Contest** then took place until mid-afternoon, after which the **Animo Theater** gave a puppet show for the general public on marine conservation and waste management. A variety show ended the day with the participation of three music bands, along with the West Negros University *Kalingaw* theater group and the Weltwärts volunteer group. Dr. Walter Salzer, Senior Program Adviser of GTZ also gave his message on the Filipino-German ties for biodiversity conservation during the show. Winners of the IBD Photo and Canvass Painting Contests were also announced and awarded.

All in all, the Province of Negros Occidental can look back on some very successful events in conjunction with the IBD 2010. The activities opened the minds of participants and visitors who came from all sectors of Philippine society. The Province of Negros Occidental, on behalf of the

Republic of the Philippines, would therefore like to express its gratitude to the Federal Republic of Germany for the contribution of funds and the chance to represent our country in this momentous international event, which hopefully has put us on the map of pristine spots of biodiversity. Visitors are welcome anytime!.

For more information on the IBD celebration in Negros Occidental and to view our IBD events video, go to <http://www.ibd-ph.com>. A link on our website will also lead you to our IBD Facebook account.

Special Thanks to:

German Development Organizations:

- GTZ
- GTZ-AHT
- DED
- KfW
- Weltwärts
- ACCBio

The various offices of the Negros Occidental Provincial Government:

- Provincial Environment and Management Office
- Provincial Planning and Development Office
- Provincial Information Office
- Provincial Tourism Office
- Negros Museum
- Governor's Office
- Vice Governor's Office
- Sangguniang Panlalawigan of Negros Occidental

Local government units of:

- Bacolod City
- Silay City
- Municipality of Pulupandan
- Barangay Punta Taytay of Bacolod City

Negros Occidental Local Government Alliances and Organizations:

- Northern Negros Aquatic Resources Management Advisory Council
- Central Negros Council for Coastal Resource Development
- Kabankalan-Himamaylan-Ilog Integrated Coastal Area Management Council
- Southern Negros Coastal Development Management Council
- North Negros Natural Park *Bantay Bukid* Brigade

Government Agencies:

- Department of Environment and Natural Resources (National, Region VI and Provincial Offices)
- Provincial Fishery Office of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources
- Philippine National Police

NGO's:

- Animo Puppet Theater
- Philippine Reef and Rainforest Conservation Foundation, Inc.
- Negros Forest Ecological Foundation, Inc.
- Museo Sang Bata sa Negros Foundation, Inc.
- AID Foundation, Inc.
- Philippine Biodiversity Conservation Foundation, Inc.

Academe:

- University of St. La Salle
- West Negros University
- La Consolacion College
- Amity Youth Volunteers

Art Associations:

- Art Association of Bacolod
- Sagay Association of Vito Artists
- Sagay PYAP Artists Group
- Du-ag Sagay Artists
- CHMSC Artshoppe
- Create Summer Arts Workshop

Musical Bands:

- Horse Driven Bus
- Acoustic Alibi
- Guinea

Sponsors and Suppliers:

- Digitalfoundry
- Night Birds
- SM City Bacolod
- Globe Telecom, Bacolod
- McDonalds, Lacson Branch
- Jesse Photoworks