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Interviews: Godofredo Villapando (ZSL Philippines) and Sabine Schoppe (Katala Foundation Incorporated)

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Conservation groups unite to save the endangered Palawan Pangolin 25-year strategy unveiled to protect species only found in the Philippines

Conservation groups in the Philippines this week joined forces with the government, indigenous peoples groups and key law enforcement agencies to launch the first ever national strategy to save the endangered Palawan pangolin (*Manis culionensis*), the only pangolin species to occur in the Philippines.

The unprecedented event saw staff from the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) Philippines, the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development Staff (PCSDS), the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Species Survival Commission (IUCN SSC) Pangolin Specialist Group and Katala Foundation Incorporated come together at a workshop from 11-13 April in Palawan's capital, Puerto Princesa City. Working alongside key stakeholders, they designed a roadmap to safeguard the future of the species over the next 25 years.

The strategy, unveiled today, outlines key recommendations to ensure the ongoing survival of Palawan's pangolin populations, which can only be found in the Philippine province. These include improved law enforcement to prevent poaching and trafficking, engagement with communities to increase local stewardship and protection efforts, and the prevention of habitat loss and degradation caused by poor land use planning.

ZSL Philippines Country Manager, Godofredo Villapando, said: "All parties across the Philippines needed to ensure the future survival of the Palawan pangolin have come together to create this strategy. That in itself is unprecedented and provides great cause for optimism.

"The strategy we've come up with provides us with a roadmap to ensure the Palawan pangolin does not join the list of species to have disappeared from the planet".

The Palawan pangolin is one of eight members of the pangolin family, which are indigenous to Africa and Asia. Also known as the Philippine pangolin, they have the smallest range of any pangolin species, only inhabiting the Palawan group of islands. Populations are thought to have declined by more than 50 percent over the past 20 years.

Like all pangolin species, Palawan pangolins are under severe pressure from poaching for their scales and meat, which are trafficked to other parts of the Philippines and East Asia, and consumed locally as food or medicine. Loss and degradation of forest and grassland habitats is also thought to be having a negative impact on populations.

Worldwide, more than one million pangolins are believed to have been snatched from the wild in the past decade alone. The animals were recently up-listed to the highest category of protection

under CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species), making all commercial trade in wild caught pangolins and their parts illegal. As CITES Management Authority for terrestrial species in Palawan, PCSD is responsible for controlling trade in the Palawan pangolin. PCSDS, together with local government units, has a vital role to play in ensuring the successful implementation of the conservation strategy.

Nelson Devanadera, Executive Director of PCSDS, added: “As an animal that’s endemic to Palawan, we have a huge responsibility to protect this vital part of the Philippines’ natural heritage.”

“This can only be achieved by forging stronger links between the institutions represented here and building on the momentum this strategy offers in addressing the twin threats of poaching and habitat loss.”

-ENDS-

Notes to editors

Media contact

Godofredo Villapando (ZSL Philippines; godof.villapando@yahoo.com) and Sabine Schoppe (Katala Foundation Incorporated; sabine_schoppe@web.de).

Related images available here:

ZSL

Founded in 1826, ZSL (Zoological Society of London) is an international scientific, conservation and educational charity whose mission is to promote and achieve the worldwide conservation of animals and their habitats. Our mission is realised through our ground-breaking science, our active conservation projects in more than 50 countries and our two Zoos, ZSL London Zoo and ZSL Whipsnade Zoo. ZSL is the institutional host of the IUCN SSC Pangolin Specialist Group and has actively supported and engaged in pangolin conservation since 2011. For more information visit www.zsl.org

Palawan Council on Sustainable Development (PCSD)

The Palawan Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD) is a multi-sectoral and inter-disciplinary body, which under the law is charged with the governance, implementation and policy direction of the Strategic Environmental Plan (SEP) for Palawan Act (Republic Act 7611). The SEP aims to promote development, conservation, management, protection and utilization of the natural resources of Palawan for the present and future generations.

Katala Foundation Incorporated

For the past 20 years, Katala Foundation Incorporated, a non-profit, non-stock, non-governmental organization is active in protecting and conserving wildlife, particularly the Philippine Cockatoo, the Palawan Forest Turtle, the Palawan Pangolin and other highly threatened wildlife in Southeast Asia, but particularly in Palawan, Philippines. KFI’s Palawan Pangolin Conservation Program (PPCP) has sought to understand and address the conservation needs of the Palawan pangolin since 2008.

IUCN SSC Pangolin Specialist Group

Established in 2012, the IUCN SSC Pangolin Specialist Group (PangolinSG) is a voluntary network of more than 100 scientists and practitioners whose mission is ‘to secure a future for wild pangolins through advancing knowledge on pangolin status, threats and conservation priorities, and by catalysing action to conserve them’. It is the scientific advisory body on pangolins to IUCN and

provides technical expertise and advice to governments, NGOs, academic institutions and individuals in support of pangolin conservation. The PangolinSG is also the Red List Authority for pangolins, carrying out Red List assessments for inclusion in the IUCN Red List.

Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund

The Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund is a philanthropic endowment providing targeted grants to individual species conservation projects, recognise leaders in the field of species conservation and elevate the importance of species in the broader conservation debate. The Fund has generously provided funding to support the National Conservation Planning Workshop for the Palawan Pangolin.