

PRESS RELEASE

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Katala Foundation

Learning the benefits of eating fruits: An exhibit on the ecology and conservation of seed dispersal

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“Palawan’s forest is an example of a forest reforested for free by fruit-eating animals. Its diverse wildlife particularly the frugivores (animals feeding on fruits) lead to the high activity of seed dispersal resulting to diverse forests”, explains Peter Widmann, conservation biologist and Vice President of Katala Foundation (KF).

The Katala Foundation launched an exhibit called the “Seeds of Life” at the Kamarikutan Art Galleri from October 19 to November 17, 2006. The exhibit explains the ecology and conservation of seed dispersal, one of the many ecological processes that people take for granted. It tries to explain the many benefits of eating fruits beside its nutritional value. This free service provided by wildlife is responsible for the maintenance and regeneration of plant communities; therefore plant and animal interrelationship is likewise given recognition in the exhibit.

In a research conducted in Aborlan by Mr. Widmann, *“70% of woody plants in a 10 hectare secondary forest produced fruits which are consumed by animals”*. He added that *“through the seed-dispersal activity of fruit-eating animals, the diversity of Palawan’s forest can be maintained.”*

The exhibit presents concepts in a more interesting manner to help viewers realize and understand better the importance of seed dispersal. Thanks to the funding support from the **Ford Conservation and Environmental Grants**.

The threats

Hunting and poaching in Palawan continues to threaten the seed-dispersing animals. Southern Palawan is a major source area for the illegal wildlife trade not only in Palawan but throughout the Philippines.

Because of the large body sizes of many fruit eaters, they are hunted for bushmeat, like wild pigs, monkeys, porcupines, pigeons, or turtles. In addition to hunting for the meat, poaching of animals for the pet trade is another major threat factor for fruit eaters. Most commonly affected species and species groups are civets, monkeys, squirrels, parrots, and hill mynas. In the Municipality of Rizal in Southern Palawan alone, hundreds of mynas and parrots are confiscated every year which are intended for shipment for pet trade.

The challenge

Conservation on the ground is quite a challenge. The Katala Foundation implements the Philippine Cockatoo Conservation Program (PCCP) primarily in Palawan in the Municipalities of Narra, Rizal and Dumaran. The recruitment and capacity-building of ex-poachers as wildlife wardens has demonstrated as an effective strategy in curbing illegal wildlife trade at least to allow population recovery. However, all these pursuits are made possible through the concerted and intensified efforts of the Katala Foundation and the local partners particularly the local government units. The partnership between local governments is vital to effect conservation on the ground.

While our forests are the last refuge of these fruit-eating animals, the pressure on these ecosystems are surmounting. The protection of the remaining forests is one of the biggest economical, ecological and societal challenges the Philippines face. It requires determination and sincerity, since hundreds of lives are lost every year as direct consequence of forest destruction. The greatest challenge then is to understand how our very lives are affected by our greedy actions to promote our own desires.

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Editor's Notes:

- A picture of the exhibit is enclosed.
- Katala Foundation (KF) is based in Puerto Princesa City, Palawan. It implements the Philippine Cockatoo Conservation Program in the Philippines with target sites in Palawan, the stronghold of the species. KF uses the Katala or the Philippine cockatoo as its flagship species but employs an ecosystemic and participatory approach for conservation.
- The PCCP implements nest protection, livelihood, habitat protection and restoration and conservation education mostly in Palawan and in Polillo Island, Luzon.
- KF facilitated the declaration of Rasa Island in Narra as Wildlife Sanctuary under Presidential Proclamation 1000 signed by Her Excellency Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo this year. Locally declared protected areas are also established in project sites in Dumaran and Rizal, Palawan.

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