

Rasa Island joins as top birdwatching sites in the Philippines

By Deborah V. van den Beukel

Rasa Island Wildlife Sanctuary was recently selected by the Department of Tourism (DOT) Philippines as one of the top 13 birdwatching sites in the country

October 20, 2008 -. The conservation efforts on Rasa Island paid off as the island sanctuary was recently named as one of the top 13 birdwatching sites in the Philippines. Rasa Island Wildlife Sanctuary holds probably the densest population of the critically endangered Philippine cockatoo *Cacatua haematuropygia* in the wild! In July 2008, the cockatoo population for the first time since project implementation in 1998 passed the 200 individual mark.

Rasa Island was declared Wildlife Sanctuary through Presidential Proclamation 1000 in 2006. The small coral island is not only the core habitat of the Philippine cockatoo, but also of other globally threatened or near-threatened bird species. Rasa is located in Narra, Palawan. The municipality is now called the "World Capital of the Philippine Cockatoo". Rasa Island is the pilot site of the Philippine Cockatoo Conservation Programme (PCCP) under the Katala Foundation.

The DOT is promoting birdwatching as an alternative activity that could promote the Philippines both locally and abroad under its Adventure Philippines Campaign. DOT Secretary Joseph "Ace" Durano recently launched the first volume of a guidebook called "Birdwatching in the Philippines" which featured Rasa Island. This is also part of the worldwide promotion that the DOT is undertaking to show to both Filipino and foreign wildlife enthusiasts the various birdwatching destinations in the Philippines.

Other top birdwatching spots covered in the DOT's "Birdwatching in the Philippines" project are Mt. Makiling in Los Baños, Laguna; Subic Bay in Zambales; Candaba Marsh in Pampanga; Northern Sierra Madre Nature Park in Cagayan; St. Paul's National Park in Puerto Princesa, Palawan; Olango Island Wildlife Sanctuary in Cebu; Rajah Sikatuna National Park in Bohol; Mt. Kitanglad in Bukidnon and Mt. Apo National Park in Davao.

The record shows that more than 600 bird species are identified throughout the Philippines in which 200 of them are endemic to the country.

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