

CONSERVATION OF THE RED-VENTED COCKATOO

By Marc Boussekey, EEP Coordinator, Espace Zoologique, (France).

I was able to visit the Philippines again, mainly Palawan from July 12th to August 12th 1995, just after the Red-vented Cockatoo breeding season, to see how the Conservation Program was going on.

My purpose was fourfold:

- to observe some of the latest viable populations of Philippine Cockatoos left on Palawan
- to evaluate the local captive population of this bird
- to meet our Philippine partners involved in the conservation program
- to meet some members of the *Sagip Katala* ("Save the Cockatoo") Movement

I was lucky to be successful on all these points so, we decided to intensify our conservation program in '96 on Palawan.

Red-vented Cockatoo Flocks Observed in the Wild

More than 100 wild Cockatoos were seen in the Palawanese area: 4 flocks from 4 different localities were observed in 4 different activities.

Flock No 1 was seen feeding in the forest surrounding the small village of Tagnipa. The birds were easily approached and were unafraid of man since they are actively protected by the local people even if some predation is made on the rice fields during the harvesting time.

Flock No 2 was observed roosting near the sea shore, on an uninhabited part of the island: again, the birds were not shy at all.

Flock No 3 was a bit more on the alert since the Cockatoos were feeding on the ground and were used to being chased off the corn field. Interestingly, when the flock left the place after half an hour to perch on nearby trees, I could clearly hear the very distinctive calls the juveniles produce when they beg for food. I could even observe one adult regurgitating food to one young. This means there are still some Cockatoo populations where hatchlings are not poached at all. I knew the mangrove area where I watched **Flock No 4** from a previous trip (October 92): local people confirmed to me that Cockatoos were observed daily.

These observations and other information obtained by our local partners indicate there are still some safe and viable populations of

Red-vented Cockatoos in the Palawanese province.

Cockatoos Observed in Captivity

Apart from about 40 Philippine Cockatoos seen at Antonio De Dios facility 12 more were found in private hands.

I was able to visit again the breeding farm of Birds International Incorporated: I was allowed to see some of the hand-reared hatchlings (26 bred this year), two groups of about 20 juveniles from one to two years old and several of the 20 current pairs, 10 of which are already breeding. This local captive population is healthy and really well maintained.

Our Philippine Partners

Priscilla ADRIANO and Art PALATINO are our major partners in the Philippines: the successful broadcast program they have conducted from September 94 to March 95 (and that we sponsored) enabled them to organise a network of local informants and protectors for the Philippine Cockatoo throughout the Palawanese province: the *Sagip Katala* Movement (see references). They were my companions during my field trips. All the places I visited had been checked by them before and all the people I met in the field were members of the movement. I was really impressed by the tremendous work Priscilla and Art have done in convincing villagers to protect the Cockatoo and poachers to stop catching the hatchlings from the nests.

The management staff of the Crocodile Farming Institute provided me with a car and a driver for our field trips: when you know the difficulty of travelling throughout Palawan on local transport, this help was much appreciated. I have had two official meetings with the representatives of the Philippine government in Manila (Quezon City) and in Puerto Princesa in order to discuss progress and plans for Red-vented Cockatoo conservation.

I met again Antonio De Dios: he kindly provided me with the detailed diet of the Philippine Cockatoos in his collection, the data of blood analysis he performed locally and gave me useful information about the management of his breeding Cockatoo group.



William Oliver's superb painting of the Red-vented Cockatoo has been used for education and fund-raising.

The Sagip Katala Movement

I was pleased to meet several members of the *Sagip Katala* Movement on 4 different places in the Palawanese province.

Interestingly, two of them were ex-poachers: they showed me several Cockatoo nesting trees and how they climbed the trunk in order to catch the hatchlings. I was impressed by the height of these trees: they are usually the tallest of the area with nest holes more than 30 meters high! The knowledge these ex-poachers have on the Cockatoos is now very useful for our conservation program.

I was guided and hosted on Dumaran island by one very dedicated member, Ralph CUDILLA who is very keen to protect wildlife on this small island off Palawan: he was sure that no poaching occurs in this refuge for the Cockatoo (one of the best: 100 birds are said to live there).

The students of the Palawan State University I met are very important to spread information at school: they were really active during the radio program.

Because of the good results obtained by Priscilla ADRIANO and Art PALATINO with their broadcast program, the hope to save the Red-vented Cockatoo in the Palawanese province is increasing, at least in the areas where viable populations can still be found. Our Philippine partners are really active and eager to succeed. The *Sagip Katala* Movement numbers 40 people involved in 5 different localities. The local government has recently

issued an official memoranda on Cockatoo conservation.

Nevertheless, three aspects can be improved in 96: to increase the awareness and participation of local people, to make sure the nests are not poached, and to offer a reliable and qualified facility for the confiscated birds. The problem of the occurrence of PBF in the wild population was also discussed. So, we have decided:

- to pursue the broadcast program and to set up a nest protection scheme with the help of the ex-poachers, giving incentives to them: Priscilla and Art will submit their proposal at the end of September 95.
- to build a quarantine and aviary within the CFI Wildlife Rescue Centre: a project will be ready soon.
- to initiate a PBF research program in testing not only the hatchlings in the nests (Nicolas RICHERT's veterinary thesis) but also the confiscated birds (Mundita SISON LIM's proposal)

I do hope we shall be able to raise enough funds to sponsor this exciting program: we have now the chance to succeed in saving the Red-vented Cockatoo on Palawan.

The World Parrot Trust has previously assisted Marc Boussekey's work with this cockatoo, by providing funds towards flights. The project is in a very positive phase so the Trustees have therefore decided to provide \$2000 (approx. £1300) towards a total requirement of \$17470.

PARROTS IN THE WILD



RED-VENTED COCKATOO *Cacatua haematuropygia*

Brief report from Marc Boussekey, EEP Coordinator for this species:-

In the Summer of 1995 I was able, once again, to visit Palawan in The Philippines, and found that there is hope of saving populations of the Red-vented Cockatoo.

In the field more than 100 birds were observed in four locations, carrying out different activities: two flocks were feeding, one on wild seeds and the other on a corn field, another flock was roosting at night, and yet another was seen foraging in the mangrove. These populations are no longer disturbed by the local people. Regarding cockatoos seen in captivity, the colony at Antonio de Dios's facility is breeding well with 26 hatched this year. The local trade is slowly going down, with only three birds seen for sale and some private pet owners are ready to cooperate.

Our Philippine partners, mainly Priscilla Adriano and Art Palatino, are really active on Palawan. They run a weekly broadcast programme and have organised an efficient local network of informants and protectors: this is called the 'Sagip Katala Movement', or 'Save the Cockatoos'.

Three projects are planned for 1996 on Palawan. First, to protect known nesting places. Second, to build an aviary and quarantine facility for confiscated cockatoos. Third, to test for the occurrence of PBFD in the wild population. To achieve these aims more funds are still needed - see our report on page 7 of this issue.

Photo of tame but free-flying Red-vented Cockatoo on Palawan by J. Saint-Pie and Marc Boussekey.

We intend to continue this series of 'Parrots in the Wild', and would welcome suitable photographs from readers.