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PRESS RELEASE For Immediate Release

Rarerecords of Palawan wildlife highlight results of Rapid Biodiversity Assessment in IPPF

May 23, 2016, Puerto Princesa City, Palawan. A group of local experts from Western Philippines University, DENR, Wild Expeditions Palawan and Katala Foundation assessed the occurrence of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fishes, insects and plants in the breeding habitat of the critically endangered Philippine Cockatoo within the Iwahig Prison and Penal Farm (IPPF).

Although the area was selectively logged in the past, the diversity of flora and fauna of this regenerating forest was astounding. Some of the species were previously recorded only from single specimen in Palawan, like two species of free-tailed bats, whereas others were found for the first time on the island. There is an observation of a possible range extension of a frog species, or it may be a new species altogether. Undoubtedly the most exciting finds were those of species so far unknown to science. Although specimens still have to be examined, it appears that at least two new species of freshwater fish and one new species of magnolia were discovered during the rapid biodiversity assessment conducted from May 11 to 16, 2016 at the Malabo Forest, Montible, Puerto Princesa City.

However, not all is well in the area. Members of the team failed to record Palawan Peacock-pheasant and Red Junglefowl. The scarcity or absence of these two species indicate that illegal hunting and trapping is rampant in the forest. At the same time these observations underscore the urgency to set aside this location as protected area for the Philippine cockatoo and a host of other rare species typical for Palawan's lowland forests.

The Iwahig Prison and Penal Farm (IPPF) is of outstanding conservation importance. Out of ca. 320 bird species found in Palawan, 177 are recorded in IPPF. The area also is home to the globally third-most important Philippine Cockatoo population, after Rasa Island and Pandanan/Bugsuk Islands. Due to its high number of different ecosystems harboring a diverse flora and fauna of outstanding conservation concern, it is recognized that a sustained

biodiversity conservation is essential to ensure a balanced ecosystem within the area. A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between and among PCSDS, CENRO-DENR, KFI and the IPPF was recently forged in April 2016 to implement the IPPF-Biodiversity Conservation Program (IPPF-BCP). The goal of the said program is to protect, conserve and maintain the diversity and function of ecosystems and wildlife species through the establishment of a critical habitat.

The team was assisted by the IPPF guard and prisoners during the assessment. The Gratuitous Permit was granted by the PCSD for the said activity.

The RBA was funded by Chester Zoo, Beauval Nature and ZGAP.

For more information, please contact Indira Widmann, Katala Foundation, P.O. Box 390, Puerto Princesa City, Palawan or at idlacerna@yahoo.com and visit our homepage at www.philippinecockatoo.org.

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Editor's Note:

- Katala Foundation, Inc. (KFI) uses the endemic Philippine cockatoo as its flagship species to achieve its vision of conserving biodiversity with the active community involvement.
- The IPPF-BCP is a joint effort of the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development Staff, DENR-CENRO Puerto Princesa City, Katala Foundation Inc. and the Iwahig Prison and Penal Farm.
- Pictures attached:



Free-tailed bats are very rarely caught in surveys and therefore are poorly known in Palawan; only two species are recorded from the island and two species were netted during the survey in IPPF ©PWidmann, KFI



The Red-headed Flameback is the second-most threatened resident bird species in Palawan, after the Philippine Cockatoo. This woodpecker species is endemic to the island and currently listed as globally “endangered”. ©PWidmann, KFI



Malabo River within the lowland forest area of Iwahig Prison and Penal Farm©PWidmann, KFI