

The CAGAYAN RIDGE MARINE BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION CORRIDOR is home to a World Heritage Site natural marine park and a stunning diversity of marine flora and fauna.

Work in Progress...

CI-Philippines engaged partners to work on the SSS Project in the Cagayan Ridge Marine Biodiversity Conservation Corridor (CRMBCC). The partnership makes possible the active exchange of information and technical expertise in marine protected areas design, as well as the involvement of stakeholders in discussion and planning. CI facilitates interaction among local stakeholders and organizes discussions and dialogues among collaborators from all over the corridor. As a result, issues have been aired, gray areas clarified, perceptions on resource location, use and threats identified, and next steps agreed on.

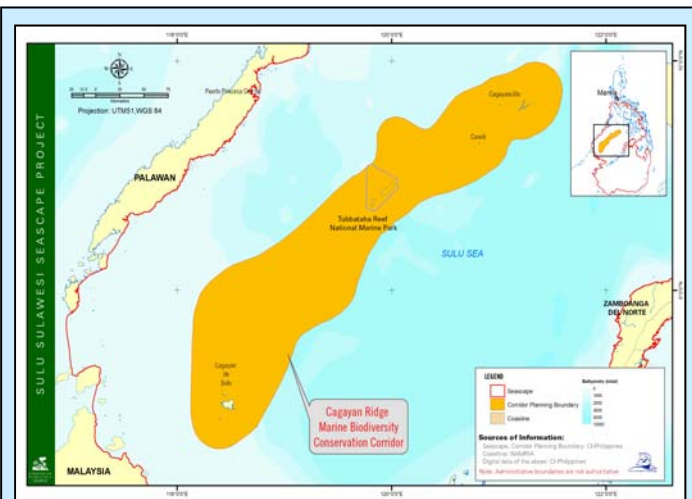


CI-P provided a much-needed boat engine to be used by Tubbataha Management Office in various works within the Tubbataha Reef Natural Park (photo © Juergen Freund).

From the onset of the project implementation in January 2006, CI-P has contributed to enforcement efforts with a donation of a much-needed boat engine, provided support for the bird-banding work of the Tubbataha Management Office, and computed the economic value of boat grounding, a major cause of marine

habitat disturbance, to provide a basis for imposing boat grounding penalties. Test fishing to monitor catch and by-catch is ongoing. Data from this exercise will contribute to the pressure assessment for the corridor, and lead to the development of policies addressing by-catch issues. The connectivity and recruitment patterns within this MBCC are being studied by the University of the Philippines (UP) Marine Science Institute and UP Visayas. Information collected will provide inputs for designing marine protected area networks, and their corresponding management systems, within the seascope.


Oil and gas corporations will be invited to participate in the development of a conservation strategy for the CRMBCC, and to demonstrate the sustainable management of protected areas found adjacent to exploration areas. An exchange of ideas will be encouraged for joint activities, and to develop the forum for the corporations' Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs.



GLOBAL IMPORTANCE

Small islands, atolls and shoals, from the Sultana Shoal in the north to the San Miguel islands in the south, make up the Cagayan Ridge Corridor in the middle of the Sulu Sea. Its offshore location exposes the Cagayan Ridge to both northeast and southwest monsoons, so that travel by boat is best between March and May, when the sea is at its calmest. The most famous reef located along the ridge is the 96,828-hectare Tubbataha Reef Natural Park (TRNP). TRNP has been declared the only purely marine World Heritage Site in Southeast Asia by UNESCO, and in 1999, it was also declared a RAMSAR (The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands) site to demonstrate its global importance to the conservation of congregating seabird species.

The TRNP has a high diversity of corals, reef fishes, algae and sea-grasses, and large animals like sharks and cetaceans. The islets on the two large atolls are known sea turtle nesting sites, as well as important feeding and breeding grounds for seabirds. Known scuba-diving destinations along the ridge are Jessie Beazely, Basterra, Bancauan and Bancoran, and the inhabited islands are Cawili, Arena, Calusa and Cagayancillo. The TRNP is managed by the Tubbataha Protected Areas Management Board (TPAMB), of which Conservation International (CI) is a member.



CONSERVATION VISION
Conservation International's mission is to conserve the Earth's living heritage — our global biodiversity — and to demonstrate that human societies are able to live harmoniously with nature.

True Conservation Heroes

Giving up paradise may be too much to ask of anyone, but that is exactly what 6,000 Cagayanens (inhabitants of Cagayancillo) did to respect the national decision to declare the Tubbataha Reefs National Parks a no-take zone. But hardly had they recovered from the sacrifice when CI entered the picture, armed with science and eager to expand the no-take area to three times its original size.

CI did not run into complacency; rather, there were major local efforts to understand conservation benefits and to stay patient until such benefits arrived. With the expansion in place, the challenge in the corridor now is to address the question, "What's in it for them?" The conservation heroes on the island are waiting for answers. This story of CRMBCC will be the story of how conservation actions must ultimately make up for the sacrifice of the Cagayanens.

photo (c) Joergen Freund

Placing conservation bets...

Not unlike betting on sports, conservation management looks into the outcomes of conservation action. Allocating conservation funds means exploring the ins and outs of conservation action, and trying to beat the odds and assure winnings—in this case, conservation results.

But coastal and marine conservation has an added dimension: that of stakeholder perception. Unlike betting on horses, which run in one direction, betting on coastal conservation means betting on the performance of coastal stakeholders, different people with varied circumstances and points of view. They may be fishers in small outrigger boats waiting for their hooks to bring in the day's catch, or fish vendors in the market, or the mayor in his office thinking of the next term, or the teacher, or the priest.

In order to identify the best conservation bets in the CRMBCC, the Sulu-Sulawesi team organized a meeting with stakeholders to find out their thoughts on conservation, their needs, their expectations from outsiders working with them, and how they will best be able to participate in conservation.



Stakeholders participated in a public consultation workshop in Cagayancillo, Palawan to level off their perceptions and expectations from the Sulu-Sulawesi Seascape Project (photo © CI, W.Azucena)

Danger from the outside...

The management of Cagayan Ridge must deal with both local and foreign commercial fishers poaching within the no-take confines of the Tubbataha Reef Natural Park (TRNP). Improved fisheries management in the Visayan Sea has forced fishers to move beyond that area into TRNP waters. Limited personnel and meager resources make it difficult to protect habitats (such as coral reefs) and species (such as seabirds, marine turtles and marine mammals) from park intruders.

Fines collected from environmental crimes such as damage to corals and wildlife from boat grounding and the dropping of anchors are not enough to cover park management needs. Prior to the implementation of the Sulu-Sulawesi Seascape (SSS) Project, the park boundaries were unclear. The Republic Act that will institutionalize TRNP's natural park status has been pending in congress for the past five years. There is also a need for proper park management orientation for Tubbataha Protected Area Management Board (TPAMB) members.



A Chinese boat caught within the waters of Tubbataha Reefs carrying critically endangered Napoleon Wrasse.

Progress makes perfect...

Forty-three Cagayanons joined the Marine Biodiversity Corridor Workshop for Cagayancillo on March 31, 2006 at the Cagayancillo Multipurpose Hall. At the workshop, maps were used as reference for discussions on resources, resource use, threats to resources and threatened species. Stakeholders expressed their interest in learning about conservation and the responsibilities that went with this new concept. They informed their colleagues and CI of the progress they had made so far. Accomplishments included:

- The mapping and delineation of municipal borders/boundaries
- The establishment of local marine protected areas (marine reserves or sanctuaries) through local legislative processes
- The identification of traditional resource uses in the coastal marine areas of Cagayancillo through community mapping
- The validation of resource use with the aid of GPS and GIS
- The presentation and validation of maps with local communities
- The formation of Solid Waste Management Councils at the barangay and municipal levels

At the workshop, stakeholders aired their issues on MPA markers that were deployed but later destroyed, the lack of MPA guard outposts, and the fisheries law enforcement teams that had yet to be organized. The SSS team worked with the stakeholders to identify necessary points of interaction:

- Developing monitoring and evaluation protocol for local MPAs, in comparison with areas outside of the MPAs
- Conducting continuing research for the periodic review and improvement of MPA management plans
- Equipping the Bantay Dagat with radio communication units, search lights, flashlights, raincoats, uniforms and training.



Local stakeholders from Cagayancillo provided their inputs in developing their resource map during the stakeholders' perception workshop (photo © Ferdie Maon).

We're Fine with Fines

Watching out for the welfare of the TRNP is no trivial chore. It requires balancing a meager budget, running after poachers, preparing proposals, campaigning for funds and more. Park Manager Angelique Songo expressed concern that new problems are now surfacing due to increasing tourism activity and boat traffic. These contribute to the disturbance of wildlife on small islands and the destruction of corals from boat grounding and the dropping of anchors. The SSS Project made a study of the economic valuation of boat grounding in the TRNP, and found that the park's coral reefs provide an annual economic value of approximately P208 to P211 (US\$ 4.50) per square meter.

Based on production and restoration cost estimates, the study suggested that P12,000 (approximately US\$300) be charged as penalty per square meter of coral reef damaged. The Sulu-Sulawesi Seascape Project staff presented the suggestion at the Tubbataha Protected Area Management Board (TPAMB) meeting of the TRNP in December 2006. After a brief review, the TPAMB officially adopted the suggestion. This strategy provides park management with an empirical basis for the computation of fines and penalties that correspond with the degree of impact of a corresponding violation. Hopefully, violators' payments for environmental crimes committed within the park will contribute to funds set aside for park management and enforcement of laws.

The right partners...



Partners from various stakeholder groups help propel CI's effort to achieve its conservation targets in Cagayan Ridge Corridor (photo (c) CI, Ferdie Maon)

Expertise in marine resource assessment, management, oceanography, socio-economics and the like are not the sole turf of CI. The Philippines in particular has had a big head-start in the field of coastal and marine conservation, and can speak of as many coastal conservation

strategies as there are coastal municipalities in the country. To maximize partnerships to deliver on conservation outcomes in the Cagayan Ridge, the Sulu Sulawesi Seascape joined hands with credible academic, government and non-government organizations in the country. These include the University of the Philippines' Marine Science Institute and Ocean Bio Laboratory, the Tubbataha Management Office and the Tubbataha Protected Areas Management Board, the Tropical Marine Research for Conservation, the Pawikan (Sea Turtle) Conservation Project of the Protected Areas and Wildlife Bureau, and the stakeholders and Local Government Unit (LGU) of Cagayancillo. Such partnerships prove that, in the Cagayan Ridge Corridor, conservation is truly a team effort.

Anatomy of an illegal catch...

Catching illegal fishers within the Tubbataha Reef Natural Park, particularly those who are after the *samong* or *trochus*, has proved to be extremely difficult. These fishers, who are most probably from Roxas, have formulated a clandestine strategy for harvesting these invertebrates. They arrive on their motorized outrigger boats, called *bancas*, but shut off the motor just outside park waters. They use rowboats to quietly enter the park, not talking and turning off any lights on their craft. Collections of *trochus* shells are stacked in particular areas, and before sun-up these are collected, loaded in the paddle boat, and transported to the motorized boat waiting just outside park waters.

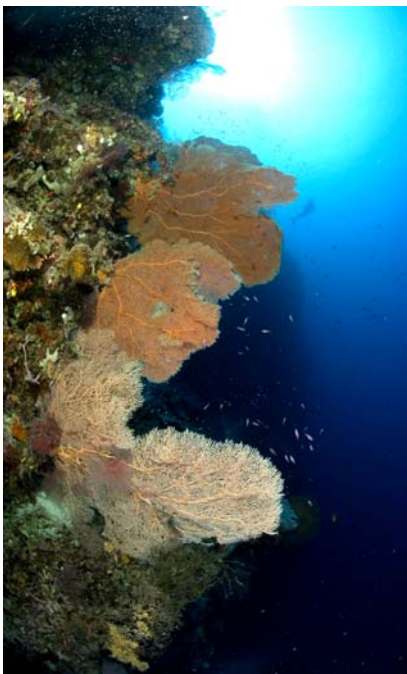
Park rangers have risked their lives trying to catch these poachers. They have endured storms during their stakeouts in *trochus* collection hotspots. Some stakeholders outside the park provided information on the *trochus* route, and through these reports, collectors were apprehended. The Tubbataha Management Office is setting up an endowment fund to support enforcement operations, personnel costs, and maintenance of the ranger station. The SSS Project provided a replacement engine to contribute to enforcement efforts.

As much as US\$200 per fish and income from the sale of sea turtles, shark meat, sea cucumbers, and giant clams make for a tempting prospect. Poachers have neither an interest in sustainable fisheries nor a respect for the rules and boundaries of marine protected areas and the efforts that go with conservation. Their concern is the constant demand, such as that from the Chinese aphrodisiac market. On December 21, 2006, 30 Chinese poachers were caught red-handed with 800 live fish, including over 300 Napoleon wrasses, inside the park. But in this part of the world, it is not as simple as putting bad men in jail—there are local and international politics to deal with.



Cut-off flippers of a green sea turtle.

Tubbataha Expands Protection Zone



Seafan alley in Tubbataha Reef Natural Park (photo © Juergen Freund).

On August 23, 2006, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo signed a proclamation expanding the Tubbataha Reef National Marine Park (TRNMP). Tubbataha is one of the most biologically diverse coral reef systems in the Philippines with a variety of marine habitat formations such as reef crests, two coral islands, lagoons and seagrass meadows. The two islands of Tubbataha support nesting areas for sea turtles and other ecologically important species, including endangered marine mammals, giant clams and sea birds.

The proclamation increased the total area of the Park threefold to 96,828 hectares and increased the Park's protection from unauthorized entries and any form of pollution or natural resource collection. The protected area will be jointly managed by a policy- and grant-making body and will benefit from the guidance of its consultative group of stakeholders called the Tubbataha Protected Area Management Board (TPAMB) which include local officials, national government agencies such as the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD) and representatives from NGOs. Members of the Philippine Navy and the Philippine Coast Guard will help in securing the Park.

A major conservation strategy in the Park is the "no take" policy, providing refuge to corals, fish and other marine flora and fauna. The only activities allowed in the park are those related to tourism, research and or conservation. Tubbataha is one of the better managed marine protected areas in the Philippines. Conservation International and its partners in the Sulu-Sulawesi Seascape are working closely to further strengthen the management implementation strategy.

For many years, Tubbataha's great conservation advantage has been its remoteness and isolation. Now it has the added benefit of the law to protect it for future generations.

For more information, contact:



Romeo B. Trono
Country Executive Director
Conservation International -Philippines
rtrono@conservation.org

Sheila G. Vergara
Sr. Marine Biodiversity Specialist
Conservation International -Philippines
svergara@conservation.org

Vivien B. Facunla
Cagayan Ridge Corridor Coordination Assoc.
Conservation International -Philippines
vfacunla@conservation.org