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# ● PROTECTING CLEOPATRA'S NEEDLE





## OVERVIEW

The lush island province of Palawan is a last frontier for conservation in the Philippines. The island boasts half of its original primary forests, some of the oldest and most diverse in Southeast Asia, and was identified in a November 2013 study published in *Science*, as the world's fourth most "irreplaceable" area for unique and threatened wildlife.

In 2016, the local and national governments of the Philippines designated Cleopatra's Needle Critical Habitat (<http://bit.ly/2gFOqKZ>), which protects more than 100,000 acres of forest on Palawan, which is home to the last 200 – 300 members of the indigenous Batak tribe, in addition to the abundance of wildlife. This is the largest critical habitat in the Philippines.

Cleopatra's Needle Critical Habitat is the culmination of a three-year project led by the Centre for Sustainability (<http://www.centreforsustainability.org/>), Palawan Council for Sustainable Development, City Environment and Natural Resources Office of Puerto Princesa and the Batak tribe, with support from Global Wildlife Conservation, Rainforest Trust (<https://www.rainforesttrust.org/>) and the Amphibian Survival Alliance (<http://www.amphibians.org/>).

## PROJECT BACKGROUND





(<https://www.globalwildlife.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/253A2295.jpg>)

## **Unique Biodiversity**

The unique blend of endemic species on Palawan can be explained by the fact that the island was once connected to Borneo, resulting in a mix of influences from Sundaland and the Philippine Archipelago. Unique or threatened species include the Philippine Cockatoo (Critically Endangered), Palawan Forest Turtle (Critically Endangered), Palawan Bearcat (Not assessed), Palawan Horned Frog (Endangered), Palawan Toadlet (Endangered) and Philippine Flat-headed Frog (Vulnerable). Approximately eighty-five percent of the long list of Palawan's endemic mammals and birds can be found around Cleopatra's Needle and together with the Underground River National Park, this is their last safe haven.



(<https://www.globalwildlife.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/253A2665.jpg>)

Other species of interest in the area include the Palawan Monitor Lizard, a 7-foot lizard recently described as a separate species, the Palawan birdwing, one of the largest butterflies in the world and only found on Palawan. In total, four Critically Endangered, two Endangered, 17 Vulnerable and 12 Near Threatened species are known from the forests of Cleopatra's Needle, while many species of reptiles, small mammals, insects and plants have yet to be assessed.





(<https://www.globalwildlife.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/253A3286.jpg>)

### **Tribal People**

The forests surrounding Cleopatra's Needle are home to the last 200 members of the Batak tribe. This tribe of hunter-gatherers, the first inhabitants of the Philippines originating in Papua New Guinea, still live in balance with the forest, with their main source of livelihood being the collection of resin, rattan, and honey, which they sell to traders. The Batak are semi-nomadic and move within the forest from camp to camp to give them better access to the forest resources. As the forest is very important for the resources they rely on, they try to protect it. However, with the decline in forest cover and the influx of outsiders the Batak have difficulty sustaining their livelihoods.





(<https://www.globalwildlife.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/253A2745.jpg>)

## **Pressures**

Commercial logging is banned in Palawan, but other threats to the forest loom large, including illegal logging, charcoal production, conversion for agriculture, mining and unsustainable tourism and related development. Without the critical habitat designation, it was likely that the forest home of the Batak and myriad species would be lost in the coming years and decades.



(<https://www.globalwildlife.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Anthracosceros-marchei.jpg>)

## QUICK FACTS



### SPECIES

*Palawan Horned Frog, Palawan Bearcat, Palawan Leopardcat, Palawan Forest Turtle, Philippines Cockatoo, Palawan Peacock Pheasant*



### REGION

*Philippines*



### HABITAT

*Tropical rainforest*



## RELATED BLOG POSTS



### Power to the Forests of Palawan

(<https://www.globalwildlife.org/2016/12/16/power-to-the-forests-of-palawan/>)

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### **Ensuring a Future for the Wildlife of the Eastern Himalayas**

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### **Searching for the Lost Last Kouprey**

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# WHAT CAN YOU DO?

No matter how big or small, there is always something you can do to help spread the conservation message.

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