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Signs point towards success in Palawan

After a successful visit to the future site of the Cleopatra's Needle Forest Reserve on Palawan Island, Robin Moore, Conservation Officer with ASA, Rainforest Trust and Global Wildlife Conservation, reported that partner organizations are laying necessary groundwork for the reserve's creation.

Philippine flat-headed frog, and Philippine cockatoo – have been identified at the site.

Despite their spectacular biodiversity, forests in the Philippines have been dramatically reduced by logging, mining, and land conversion over the past 50 years. More than half of Palawan's forests, however, remain intact.

To create the Cleopatra's Needle and protect Palawan's remaining forests, ASA, Rainforest Trust and Global Wildlife Conservation are supporting the Centre for Sustainability, a local conservation organization dedicated to preserving Palawan's biodiversity.

"The Center for Sustainability is a small but very energetic and motivated team. Their first project here in Palawan – a grouper hatchery – is very impressive and demonstrates what they are capable of. They are well placed to succeed," said Moore.

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During his visit, Moore met with officials from the City of Puerto Princesa, a key partner in the project. Working with the Centre for Sustainability, the City of Puerto Princesa will establish the reserve by declaration and enforce its protection.

"The officials I met with reiterated their support for the project and seemed genuinely excited by the potential for this to be a flagship project for Palawan," he said.

Moore later met with representatives of the Katala Foundation, a local conservation organization. He confirmed that they will lend their support to the project by engaging local people in the conservation of key species such as the Palawan forest turtle and Philippine cockatoo.

He also visited the proposed project site, hiking, and spending the night there.

"The area is really beautiful. In only a day we saw several hornbills, and more than 10 species of amphibians, including the endangered horned frogs and vulnerable flat-headed frogs, which live only in clear, pristine streams," he said.

potentially result in the discovery of new species and increase the area's conservation value even more.

While at the project site, he had a chance to meet with members of the Batak tribe, including the chief. The Batak livelihood is heavily dependent on the local environment; the tribe sustainably harvests and sells a variety of forest products including tree resins and honey.

"The Batak appear to be very engaged with the project and supportive of it. The area really is their last stronghold," he said.

Once nomadic, the Batak have been forced by the Philippine Government to establish a small village in the forest. The last 200 members of the tribe now live in the forests of Cleopatra's Needle.

Rainforest Trust has already raised over \$160,000 to fund the creation and protection of the Cleopatra's Needle Forest Reserve. To complete funding an additional \$40,000 is required.

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