



TAKING FLIGHT

The Official Newsletter of Talarak Foundation Inc.

Photo by Joe Wood

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Looking back at 2022

director's summary

2022 was another year of progress in all areas for the Talarak Foundation Inc. We have seen our education programs reignited as the Philippines permitted face-to-face education again. We have been delighted by the rise of biodiversity and our thriving released animals in the Bayawan Nature Reserve. We are seeing more visitors coming and enjoying their time at Negros Forest Park, engaging with our amazing team of volunteers, and learning about native biodiversity with our star ambassador animals. With all of these activities going well, we are thrilled to go out and talk about these efforts to partner academic and zoological institutions, both locally and internationally.

Unfortunately, even with all this progress, we have still encountered challenges. Whilst we have not been affected ourselves (yet), the country continues to be stricken with African Swine Fever, and now this deadly pig disease has reached Panay Island and Iloilo City—a stone's throw away from our Negros Forest Park site. Because of this, we are enforcing strict biosecurity and hope that these ASF countermeasures can help prevent the disease from spreading to our Warty Pigs.



Negros Forest Park

Overcoming Odette typhoon aftermath

In December 2021, the Philippines was hit by Super-Typhoon Odette/Rai, which travelled across the Visayas region, devastating Negros (along with many other islands) and some of our operational sites. The destruction caused great infrastructure damage within Negros Forest Park (NFP) and the Bayawan Nature Reserve. Our breeding center in Kabankalan City was hit hardest, as the wind, rain, and flood water destroyed aviaries and sadly killed many of our birds.

We decided that we could reduce the impact of future typhoons or flooding by consolidating the breeding efforts to Negros Forest Park and the Bayawan Nature Reserve, which are better protected from surrounding buildings and landscapes. To do this we spent a lot of time fixing the damage at Negros Forest Park and constructing new aviaries for our endemic hornbills and bleeding heart doves.

Now settled in their new aviaries, we are delighted to see some of the relocated pairs of hornbills and bleeding hearts producing offspring once again. Soon these birds will be part of the ongoing release programs and the continued breeding efforts in Talarak.

clean up progress after the typhoon



new aviaries for the relocated hornbills

A Sanctuary in the City forest in the heart of Bacolod

As we leave the Pandemic, we get back to seeing more visitors enter our parks, we welcomed more than 12'000 people through the gates of Negros Forest Park in 2022. As part of our commitment to support Provincial Environment Month in June, we opened the gates to NFP for free during an open house on Sunday June 19th. This one event, promoted through our social media channels, brought 2'800 people to NFP in one day.



open house in Negros Forest Park



VIP visitors

One key visitor late in 2022 was the British Ambassador to the Philippines, Ms Laure Beaufrils. Unfortunately, our director and curator were not available to meet with her, but she was given a warm welcome and guided tour from Mr Rhoderick Samonte (a former educator for NFP and friend of the foundation) and our Head of Education and Engagement, Mr Kim Decena.

parading for the province

In November, we took part in the annual Provincial Wildlife Month parade through the streets of Bacolod City. Championing Talarak and NFP, our staff walked alongside many other advocacy groups, school clubs, and wildlife champions, to support the continued conservation of our native Negros wildlife.



making a day out an experience

One of the reasons we are seeing greater visitor numbers is the improvement in visitor experience. This is largely down to our reinvigorated engagement and education team, led and developed by Mr Kim Decena. Under Kim's tutelage, we now have a team of 8 education, engagement and research volunteers, who provide free guided tours to families, groups or solo visitors. Our education team are also available to answer some of the crucial questions many of our visitors have, including questions around; the ecology or diets of our species, the social behavior's of our animals, or the conservation status and activities with our species' wild counterparts.



animal ambassadors

Our ambassador animals are also helping as a part of our engagement team, educating visitors on native species conservation. This year we introduced a juvenile White Bellied Sea Eagle (named Dagat) and juvenile Eastern Grass Owl (named Odette) to our existing team of raptors that perform flight shows. This is a great addition to our reptile squad of three Pythons, a Philippine Sailfin Lizard, and a Yellow Headed Monitor Lizard, which we allow guests to handle to eliminate fear of these species.





Assessing Negros Island

Out in the Field *finding new hidden treasures*

In 2021, we only saw evidence of Warty Pigs and Tarictic Hornbills in the wild, but this year, we have more good news. We captured images of wild Visayan Spotted Deer, which is the first camera trap photo of a wild Visayan Spotted Deer in the last 10 years and the first ever in a non-protected area. This location, an indigenous peoples community and rare lowland forest habitat, is also alive with hornbills, pigs, macaques, and lots of other biodiversity, putting it at the top of our list as an important site for conservation protection.

Knowing that we can still find populations of our focal species and other endemic biodiversity is good news. However, the state of our natural habitats still needs to be addressed. Our habitat assessments continue to identify that our native forests are still threatened, and newly established forests are often non-native plantations.

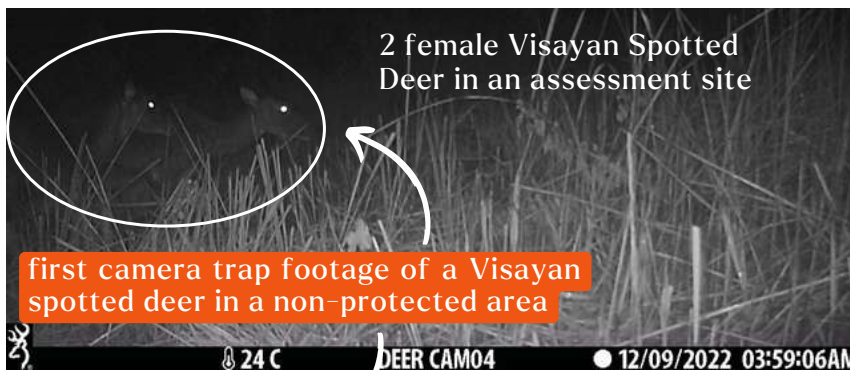


our assessment team together with their local guides



From the Community *public perceptions*

When discussing conservation and the perceptions of species and habitats with the community, we have learned a lot. We learned from older community members they remember lost species fondly, regretting their part in reducing population numbers and wishing to help restore once thriving forests. But we have also learned that a lot of the current threats facing the habitats and species come from industrialization and urban communities. Activities such as poaching are often conducted for trade or sport by people from the cities, and thus we need to target education and enforcement here.



2 female Visayan Spotted Deer in an assessment site

first camera trap footage of a Visayan spotted deer in a non-protected area



a male macaque in the same assessed site

Bayawan Nature Reserve

Caught on Camera

camera trapping for conservation

Our ongoing camera trapping efforts have continued to give us important insights into the wild lives of our released animals and the native biodiversity around them. We've recorded really interesting social behavior's of the Visayan Warty Pigs and Visayan Spotted Deer, as well as interactions between the two species. We've also seen more births for both species. This gives us hope that these captive-bred endangered and critically endangered animals can make it in the wild!

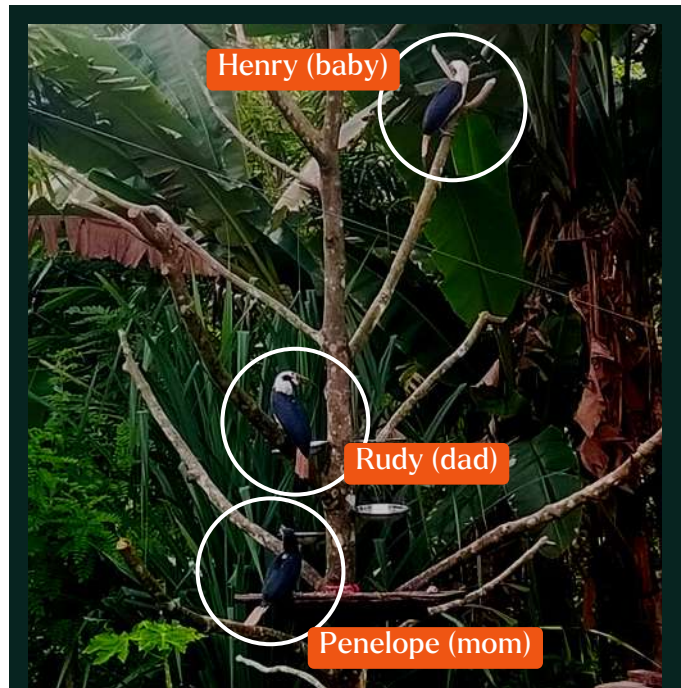


warty pig family munching on fallen java plums



warty pigs and a spotted deer sharing the same space

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Henry the Hornbill *a tarictic triumph*

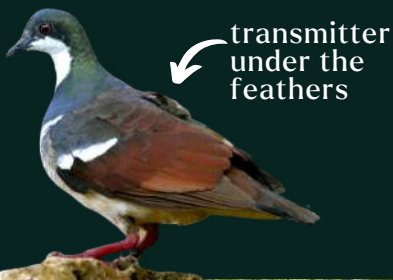
If you remembered in 2021, we released our first batch of Visayan Tarictic Hornbills in the Bayawan Nature Reserve. From there, 2 hornbills, Rudy and Penelope, bonded and weathered the December typhoon together. We placed several artificial nest boxes in the reserve for them and we were delighted to see them choose one to nest in (front cover photo). They successfully hatched and fledged a chick in this box in July this year, who we named Henry. This is exciting news as this is the first recorded case of captive Visayan Tarictic Hornbills successfully breeding in the wild!



Keeping Bleeding Hearts Beating

first flight for the Negros Bleeding-heart Dove

In collaboration with Toledo Zoo and Bristol Zoo, we started the release of Negros Bleeding-heart Doves in the Bayawan Nature Reserve. We are tracking them daily and learning more about their behavior, activity patterns, and habitat use in the wild. We are already noting their ground foraging techniques, their sleeping sites, and their social interactions. We are incredibly happy to see these critically endangered doves in their natural habitat and hope for more success in the coming year.



our hardworking trackers looking for Daphne



Keeping Pigs Out of the Pantry

finding solutions for a warty problem

Through our outreach efforts, we discovered that people hunt the Visayan Warty Pigs less for consumption but more to prevent raiding of their crops. To tackle this threat, we started a pig deterrent project with the support of long term partners ZGAP. We aim to find a deterrent system that is affordable, effective, and user-friendly, that rural farmers can utilize. Our ambassador warty pigs, Anakin and Mario, are helping us to find these right methods! With their help, we can remove the biggest threat warty pigs face in the wild.

deterrent examples:



pepper spray



loud noise from cans & bamboo

chilis



testing site



pig enclosures



Outreach, Education, & Capacity Building

Communities for Conservation

outreach output from communities around Bayawan Nature Reserve

We believe one of the most important aspect of conservation is outreach and education. Conservation can never succeed without the support of surrounding communities. Our team has worked very hard to spread awareness and change the behavior's of the locals around Bayawan Nature Reserve. Where we have learned the following:

- Locals who used to hunt birds with air guns and marble guns have **surrendered their weapons** to their respective Barangays (local district).



- To pass the time, children in this area have been **using slingshots to kill birds and other wildlife**. With our work, parents are now preventing their children from doing this, and the same children are **now willing to help protect the birds**.



Ann-Ann using pictures to talk about native biodiversity

our outreach team, Ann-Ann, Deanne, and Alpon, talking with locals



- There was a **Blue-naped parrot found in a cage** in a subdivision in Bayawan City. A group of **local children saw the parrot and alerted our outreach staff** with their concern that it may have been taken from the wild. Our team reached out to the property owner who admitted to capturing the bird nearby the nature reserve, believing that it needed help. He then **surrendered the bird** and apologized for taking it. He promised to contact us next time.



These instances have really given us hope for the younger generation.

While doing outreach, our team also discovered that some people have learned about our conservation efforts through village hall meetings, radio stations, and other Bayawan local media.

We are so happy to see the local government, the catholic church community, and city radio stations assisting our awareness campaign with their own messaging and broadcasting.



"The biggest impact we have seen from the public is a renewed excitement to see these species back in the area. Younger generations have never seen these species, but older generations are delighted to see these species, especially the birds, back in their community area."

Education and Engagement *bringing the classroom to life*

As the schools came back to face-face classes, we saw opportunities to reignite our junior conservation education program. We invited schools and other educational youth groups to our NFP and Bayawan facilities to have fun while learning about biodiversity conservation.

One of the groups that took up this opportunity was the Junior Chamber International (JCI) chapters of Makati Princess Urduja and Bacolod City. Together we developed an educational video about hornbills and other native species conservation, supported online fundraising efforts, and performed the Nature Day Learning Event at NFP. Advertised widely and free for those under 15 years old, the Nature Day event included; a seminar on the conservation activities of Talarak and native biodiversity, a game (pictured right) to highlight the interlinking nature of an ecosystem and humans' place within it, the co-created video about hornbill conservation, and a guided tour of the park. We hosted >80 people in total, with children aged 3-15 partaking, and received great feedback about the enjoyment and education on the day.

teaching kids about the links within ecosystem and society through an interactive game!



talarak Foundation and Junior Chamber International collaborating to educate children about the importance of biodiversity





Jojo teaching IT college students how computer technology and softwares can help in conservation

Visiting PhD student Hajra "Jojo" Munir took some time out of her studies to provide seminars to visiting students from a local university. We always aim to provide learning opportunities to students of many disciplines to learn about the intricate nature of conservation and wildlife science. We were delighted when Jojo decided to give her presentation to this excited and engaged class.

Our staff and volunteers visited the University of St La Salle Bacolod to help celebrate their biodiversity day. Bringing some of our ambassador animals to the university, our education team of Kim and Chris did a great job of raising awareness for native and under appreciated species including many of our endemic reptiles. Meanwhile our research manager Justine met with the faculty and school board to discuss the opportunities that can come from our partnerships between academia and the foundation.



students with Azul

Our director Matt Ward and research manager Justine Magbanua visited the Bayawan City Science and Technology Education Center to talk about conservation science and wildlife research. Presenting to grade 10-12 highschoolers along with fourth year undergraduate students of the Negros Oriental State University, we discussed the scientific processes involved in studying biodiversity and conservation needs, before asking the students to create their own study proposals.



Matt and Justine giving highschool and university students an exercise in study design



our research team, Guillermo and Justine, teaching students about what we do in Bayawan Nature Reserve



After this, the students visited the Bayawan Nature Reserve where they got to see the equipment and learn about the studies Talarak are conducting within the reserve.

Ariana (PH) and Dora (UK), volunteers at the Bayawan Nature Reserve, learning radio telemetry skills from researcher Guillermo



Capacity Building *creating conservationists*

Helping to create new conservationists is one of our primary aims at the foundation. One way we do this is by offering training programs for biology or other natural science students at the Bayawan Nature Reserve. The students spend several weeks learning and assisting with activities in the nature reserve, developing skills through first-hand experience. This year we welcomed more than 20 local students for this program which we hope to continue to expand in 2023.

We also offer internships and volunteering opportunities for local and international persons who are also interested to develop conservation skills. At the reserve the interns are taught the multi-disciplinary techniques of conservation, from biodiversity research and focal species study, to community engagement and project management. In 2022 we were fortunate to have 3 interns from the UK and 9 from the Philippines.

Interns and On-Job-Training students at the Bayawan Nature Reserve learning conservation skills



helping hands at Negros Forest Park

For capacity building in NFP we provide training in the various activities within the park. Including animal care and welfare, captive animal research, and visitor education and engagement, as they work alongside our enthusiastic staff.

In 2022 we had our highest turn-out yet with the involvement of more than 25 students from 3 universities in our "On-Job-Training" (OJT) program. The OJT scheme is mandatory for all university students, and we are delighted to offer NFP as a place for developing skills and experience, for passionate students to become home-grown conservationists.

These opportunities are not limited to local students, with our international internships enticing people from across the globe to come and develop crucial skills at Talarak.



OJT students in Negros Forest Park





Progress & Partners

Tagpi-Tagpi *new lives from old clothes*

We are really happy this year to be working with the organisation Tagpi-Tagpi in producing new merchandise for our foundation.

Tagpi-Tagpi is an environmentally focused organisation that provides livelihood for women in low income areas, by producing plushies from recycled clothing and environmental plastics.

Visayan Warty Pig



The hardworking women behind these amazing plushies!

Photo by Tagpi-Tagpi

Visayan Spotted Deer



Talarak Hornbill



Learn more about their work at tagpitagpi.carrd.co



ASF (African Swine Fever) *pig pandemic*

One major concern we have this year is the continued threat of African Swine Fever (ASF) in the country. While we are happy that some areas are overcoming this disease, we are getting very nervous about the rise of ASF in the neighbouring island of Panay. There have been several outbreaks in the city of Iloilo, which is a short ferry ride from Bacolod city where our primary breeding center is.

In order to mitigate the spread of ASF in our active sites, we have increased biosecurity in all entrances, enforced personnel biosecurity around warty pigs, and improved our protocols for animal handling. We hope that this and the increased vigilance around the disease will help us overcome this period of danger.

poster from the World Organisation of Animal Health placed in Negros Forest Park



presenting at the EAZA Deer TAG meeting



EAZA and Other Partners *on the European stage*

This year Talarak was invited to speak at the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA) meeting in Portugal. We went to highlight our conservation efforts, both in the captive centers and field projects, relating to the species which are being supported or held by European institutions.

At the conference we presented in the Hornbill, Deer, Pigeon and Dove, and Pig TAG meetings along with a special Philippines Working Group meeting.

extending European greetings

Whilst in Europe the Talarak team took the chance to visit some of our European partners. This time we visited our partner organizations in the Czech Republic and Poland, namely the Czech University of Life Sciences, Plzen Zoo, Liberec Zoo, and Wroclaw Zoo.

Our team had an amazing time at these institutions, being welcomed like family, seeing examples of Philippine species on display with the highest welfare, and impressed by the efforts being made by the zoos to highlight Philippine conservation.

In return we conducted guest seminars, produced media content and talked with the personnel more about our own conservation operations, how they are supporting us, and how we can continue with mutually beneficial collaborations.



talking about Talarak in CZU (above) and Plzen Zoo (below)



Photo by Plzen Zoo

Hajra "Jojo" Munir

PhDs and partnerships



One of the major events for us this year has been the start of a collaboration between Talarak Foundation Inc. and the Czech University of Life Sciences (CZU). This collaboration has been a long time coming as Matt and CZU professor Dr Francisco Ceacero have been discussing how the universities Animal Physiology and Behaviour Research Team can support the Visayan Spotted Deer conservation efforts.

This year we were so happy that our collaboration resulted in the arrival of the PhD student, Hajra Munir, who is studying the reproductive, social behaviour, husbandry and growth aspects of the Visayan Spotted Deer, in the captive breeding center and Bayawan Nature Reserve.



Jojo observing the spotted deer in Negros Forest Park



Professional Development

Monica the manager

We were so happy this year when our resident vet Dr Monica Atienza was able to attend the Durrell Endangered Species Management course at the Durrell Conservation Academy in the UK. Over this course, she developed new competencies in conservation planning and management, facilitation and communication skills, leadership, and research data management, whilst refining and improving her existing knowledge and abilities.

We are eternally thankful to Durrell for providing Monica with this invaluable education, and we look forward to continuing the development of our staff and facilities with other partners to best conserve the wildlife of the West Visayas for as long as possible.



Partners & Donors

We could not have accomplished these successes without the invaluable cooperation of our partners and donors. A huge thank you to all of those who support Talarak Foundation!



Bristol Zoological Society
Saving Wildlife Together



ZOO HEIDELBERG



ZOO LIBEREC

