

The Philippines in Brief

by Sheldon Dingle, Alhambra, California

Parrots of the Philippines include several species kept in aviculture including Philippine Cockatoo *Cacatua haematuropygia* (Red-vented), Blue-naped Parrot *Tanygnathus lucionensis*, Great-billed Parrot *Tanygnathus megalorhynchos*, and perhaps the Mindanao Lorikeet *Trichoglossus johnstoniae* which is very seldom seen in captivity. There are a number of racket-tailed parrots (*Prionituris* sp.) and the Philippine Hanging Parakeet *Loriculus philippensis* which are not in aviculture as far as I know. And how many of you have even heard of the beautiful little parrot called Guaiabero *Bolbopsittacus lunulatus*? I can't even pronounce the name.

Philippine doves and pigeons are represented in aviculture too. The two most commonly seen are the Luzon Bleeding-heart Pigeon *Gallicolumba luzonica* (see the article on page 32) and the Nicobar Pigeon *Caloenas nicobarica*. There are a number of turtle doves, and over 20 exceedingly beautiful species of fruit doves, very few of which are kept in aviculture.

Among my favorite Philippine birds in aviculture are two commoners – the Button Quail (also called Painted Quail) *Coturnix chinensis* (see article on page 21), and the daddy of all chickens, the Red Jungle Fowl *Gallus gallus gallus*.

Another of the ground birds is



The endangered Philippine Monkey-eating Eagle is one of the largest eagles in the world.

the subtly beautiful Palawan Peacock Pheasant *Polyplectron emphanum*. The oddity of this Asian species being in the Philippines lies in the strange way the Asian land masses and the Australian continent gradually moved together over the eons. The pheasants are Asian birds while the Philippine Islands are part of the island arcs that were pushed toward Asia by Australia as it moved north. Of course this happened about 30 million years ago and I don't remember it clearly. But Palawan was caught in the middle. It is really a piece of Asia but is so close to the other Philippine islands that it has some flora and fauna belonging to both land masses. There are no pheasants on any other Philippine island.

One of the Philippine's high-profile birds is the Philippine Eagle *Pithecophaga jefferyi* (also called the Philippine Monkey-eating Eagle). Indeed, it is the national bird. It is not for the ordinary backyard aviary but it is being kept in captivity by the Philippine Eagle Foundation on the island of Mindanao. Highly dedicated experts are trying frantically to save the species from extinction. So far, there have been just two chicks hatch at the Foundation (the world's first breeding) but there is great hope. Indeed, the first chick hatched was named Pag-asa – "Hope."

In the wild, there are an estimated 112 pairs – few enough to consider

the species critically endangered. Like the California Condor, the Philippine Eagle's only hope may lie in aviculture.


I am at home in Southeast Asia. I like the heat, humidity, flora, fauna, and especially the people. But my favorite region of Southeast Asia is the Philippines. It is extraordinary.

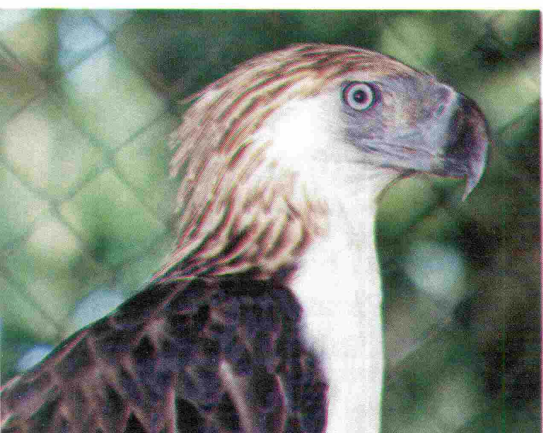
Recent oil exploration in the Philippines has given scientists a better understanding of the origins of the 7107 islands that make up the nation (the number changes with the tide – at high tide some of them disappear).

During the ice ages when the seas were much lower than now, many of the now distinct islands were connected by dry land. These ancient large islands each developed its own flora and fauna and generally remained distinct and separate from the other mega-islands. Later, when the ice melted and the seas rose, the lowlands were inundated leaving a lot of disconnected smaller islands. Until this principle was understood, explorers and biologists were perplexed at how unique faunal regions (natural units of biodiversity) could be so close to one another yet so different in their plants and animals. It has been said that the Philippines are "the Galapagos Islands times ten."

There are about six types of habitat in the Philippines with the popular image of the lowland rain forest being the most common – used to be, that is. Now the original lowland rain forests are mostly gone, chopped for timber.

As the elevations rise, the habitats change until one reaches the mountain tops like Mt. Isarog where the annual average rainfall is 36 feet. That is 420 inches of rain, dear friend, ten time more than falls on the "wet" Portland Oregon.

The great danger now is the rampant cutting of the forests. At one time 95% of the Philippines was covered with rain forest. Now the number is seven percent. But there are valiant efforts to reverse the trend. And there are many encouraging stories. With the rain forest lies the fate of the Filipino people, and of the birds and animals so many of us love. Fortunately, there is still Pag-asa — hope. 



Photos by Sheldon Dingle

The Monkey-eating Eagle is extremely powerful. Its talons grab and lock so its prey can't escape. Its massive beak is designed to tear flesh.