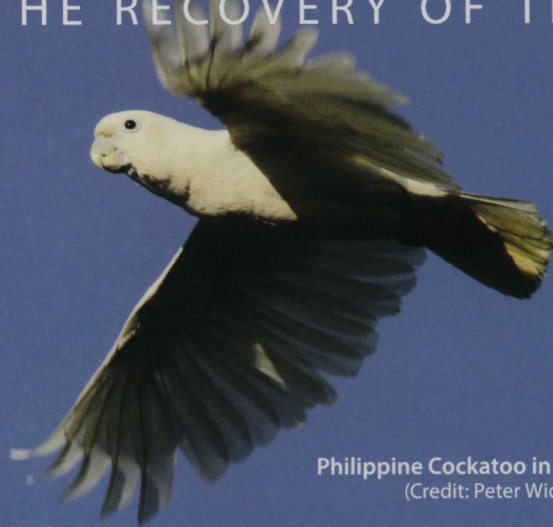


NEW RECORDS ACHIEVED IN THE RECOVERY OF THE Philippine Cockatoo

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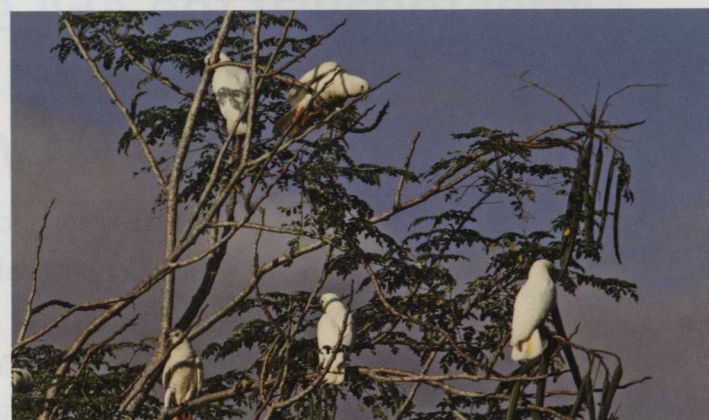
Philippine Cockatoo in flight.
(Credit: Peter Widmann)

Exciting results have just arrived from the Katala Foundation (KFI) in the Philippines about the recovery effort for the 'Critically Endangered' Philippine Cockatoo. The Loro Parque Fundación has been supporting the Philippine Cockatoo Conservation Programme (PCCP) since 1999 and, together with additional supporters Chester Zoo, Beauval nature and ZGAP, is very pleased to see the species making a gradual recovery. The last breeding season results were the best that the PCCP has ever had in the islands of Rasa and Pandanan, off the coast of the main island of Palawan. These results are reflected in steep increases of the respective cockatoo populations of those islands; and the two sites now hold around 50% of the world population of the Philippine Cockatoo (under the assumption by KFI of 1,160 birds left in the wild).

On Pandanan (Pandanan and Bugsuk Islands, southern tip of Palawan) at the end of May, 30 fledglings were recorded, which is the highest number from this project site since its beginning. Furthermore, the highest number counted at the Malinsuno roost site was attained in July, with 203 individuals, again being the highest number of cockatoos counted there since the start of the project. The recovering cockatoo population in Pandanan shows a similar rate of recovery as the one on Rasa in the earlier years, with relatively slow recruitment initially and hopefully sustained stronger growth subsequently.

60 nest trees of other cavity nesters were monitored, and a total of 104 nestlings was recorded, of which 94 were Blue-naped Parrots (*Tanygnathus lucionensis*), six Palawan Hornbills (*Anthracoceros marchei*) and four Hill Mynas (*Gracula religiosa*). Seedling stock in the month of March reached 520 in Pandanan. From May onwards, with the start of the rains, the planting of mainly food-providing plants for the cockatoos commenced. A total of 202 trees were planted, mainly to enhance succession in old shifting-cultivation sites.

In the Rasa Island Wildlife Sanctuary (RIWS), east Palawan, a total of 43 pairs attempted to breed, and the wardens recorded



Top: Roost of Philippine Cockatoos on Pandanan Island. Middle: Philippine Cockatoos feeding on Rasa Island. Bottom: Monitoring Philippine Cockatoo chicks. (Credit: Peter Widmann)



L to R: Monitoring Philippine Cockatoo chicks. (Credit: Fred Diaz) Confiscated Philippine Cockatoo chicks. (Credit: Peter Widmann) Release of young Philippine Cockatoos. (Credit: Peter Widmann)

111 eggs, of which 19 were lost due to suspected infertility, and in one case, a waterlogged nest hole. Of the 92 hatchlings 83 were leg-ringed and fledged successfully. Over the years there is a marked shift in preferred or suitable nest trees. In the early stages (year 2000) of the project, nest densities in coastal forests were high compared to mangrove, with 5.7 and 0.53 pairs/km² respectively. The nest density in coastal forest in 2015 has increased to 7.6 pairs/km² but the nest density in mangrove has increased tenfold to 5.3 pairs/km². After the breeding season the population increased dramatically to 317 individuals, no doubt augmented by the high number of fledglings of the 2015 breeding season. This is the highest count on Rasa since the beginning of the project in 1998; and for the first time the 300 individuals mark has been attained.

At the Iwahig Prison and Penal Farm, located on the Sulu Sea coastal plain of Palawan facing Rasa Island, two Philippine Cockatoo nestlings were confiscated on April 29th and were handed over to KFI for hand-raising. Based on the previous rescue and hand-raising efforts, these two cockatoos were released on August 6th at another PCCP site, the island of Dumarán. This measure was decided because currently cockatoos are better protected in Dumarán than they are in Iwahig. Also the population in Dumarán is still quite small with around thirty individual birds and may benefit from supplementation.

Since the cockatoos had ample time to train flight muscles and get used to wild food sources in the flight aviary of the Katala Institute for Ecology and Biodiversity Conservation (KIEBC), it was decided to try a “hard release” in the vicinity of the cockatoo roost in Dumarán. Once the first wild birds arrived in the afternoon of August 6th, the transport boxes were opened and both young birds flew out and landed in the adjacent vegetation. Despite the released and wild cockatoos making contact calls, the young birds did not join the roost site on a tall coconut, but slept in a tree about 30 m away from the roost site, and about 12 m above the ground.

The next morning the young birds still did not connect to the wild flock, but stayed in the general vicinity of the roost site. A feeding station was built and stocked with predominantly wild food items from the vicinity, which the young birds readily accepted. They tried several times to approach the personnel involved in monitoring, who in turn had to shoo them away repeatedly, later on with the aid of water pistols.

However, the feeding station was readily accepted from the first day; and on the second evening the released birds connected to the wild flock at the roost site. The two birds were intensively monitored over the following weeks, and eventually they successfully connected to the wild flock and followed it while foraging and roosting. At the same time the supplementary feeding was gradually reduced. One bird was found dead in the adjacent mangroves on November 19th. Although the bird was a bit light (260g), it was still in good condition and without external injuries. The other bird is still alive and connected to the wild flock.

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L to R from above: Tree nursery for later reforestation. The reintroduction site in the Siargai Islands. Transporting tree saplings to the reintroduction site. Reforestation by the local community. (Credit: Peter Widmann)



This release is encouraging for the on-going preparation of the cockatoo reintroduction site in Kangbangyo and Poneas Islands, which are within the Siargao Island group off the north tip of Mindanao. This preparation is focused on the planting of food-providing trees, and also the training and employment as wildlife warden of an ex-poacher on Kangbangyo Island starting from early February. Aside from reporting illegal activities, he is also mapping potential nest trees and takes notes on phenology of food-providing plants. Members of the local Barangay Caob Marine Association have established a tree nursery in the village premises, and as of July 2014 a total of 9,876 trees have been planted on Kangbangyo Island.



A collapsible pre-release aviary has been constructed and is stored near the release site which has been identified on Kangbangyo Island. At this stage it is very important to conduct the conservation education campaign with the local community of the islands. Conservation education measures involved school visits, focus group discussions supported by cockatoo posters and postcards, as well as information on local radio.



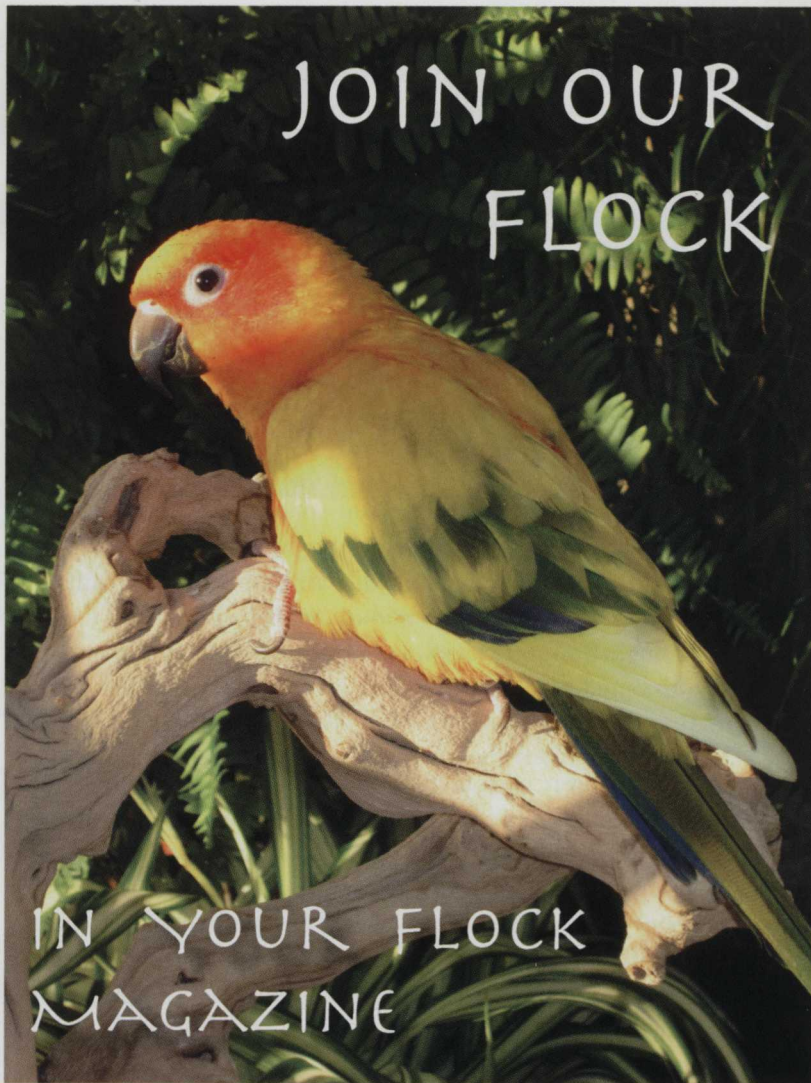
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