

Notes from the field

Conserving Central Panay Mountain's Dulungan (*Rhabdotorrhinus waldeni*), Panay Island, Philippines

Josiah David G. Quimpo

Haribon Foundation, 100 A de Legaspi St, Brgy. Marilag, Quezon City, Philippines

Author email: iba@haribon.org.ph / dtheyveed@gmail.com

Locally known as *Dulungan*, the Rufous-headed Hornbill, an Evolutionarily Distinct and Globally Endangered (EDGE) species, is one of the rarest hornbills. It can only be found in Western Visayas Biogeographic Region in the islands of Panay and Negros in Philippines. Based on previous studies, the northern parts of Central Panay Mountains Key Biodiversity Area (CPM KBA) is considered as the stronghold of Rufous-headed Hornbill's remaining population. In 2016, IUCN and BirdLife estimated their population to about 1000–2499 individuals. However, Rufous-headed Hornbill population is threatened by unsustainable human activities like slash and burn farming, forest conversion, and timber poaching. At present, only about 8% of Panay's forests remain in good condition.

In 2017, Haribon Foundation started working for Rufous-headed Hornbill conservation in the north-western (Antique) part of CPM KBA. With support from National Grid Corporation of the Philippines and in partnership with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Haribon has worked with communities in Sebaste and Culasi in Antique to conduct research on ecology and population of Rufous-headed Hornbill's and to protect its remaining



A male Rufous-headed Hornbill at a nest.

habitat. In 2019, BirdLife International and the Zoological Society of London provided support to Haribon to expand in the north-eastern part of the KBA, with the local governments of Malinao and Madalag in the province of Aklan. Haribon Foundation conducted studies on diet and nest preferences to identify important fruit and tree species for Rufous-headed Hornbill in almost the entire northern forest of the KBA. Different sectors and groups were involved, from the provincial and municipal local governments, teachers, youth, and local communities. Forest protection teams from communities surrounding the forests were formed and trained to assist in monitoring and protection of Rufous-headed Hornbill and its habitat. About 50 forest protection team



School and community projects to establish native tree species nurseries for habitat restoration.

members were taught about the importance of biodiversity and the Rufous-headed Hornbill, wildlife laws, importance of forest habitat, and its connection to humans and their communities. They were deputized by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources as Wildlife Enforcement Officers. Teachers and students

were also trained to be biodiversity and Rufous-headed Hornbill champions through Haribons' Eco-Guardians and Eco-Rangers program. The education sector played a huge role in creating awareness to the younger generation as well as their communities and families. They developed small environmental projects in their own schools and communities such as native tree nurseries composed of "Dulungan-friendly" trees, murals, posters, and tree planting activities. Local policies were also developed to safeguard the Rufous-headed Hornbill population and their habitat through establishment of Critical Habitats, a type of other effective area-based conservation measures (OECM). The municipalities of Sebaste and Malinao has identified and declared portions of their forest lands as a Critical Habitat for the Rufous-headed Hornbill and other threatened species. The province of Antique has declared the Rufous-headed Hornbill as their flagship species or as the provincial bird and was highlighted in local annual celebrations in several municipalities. Another legislation was passed by the provincial government of Antique declaring the month of August as Rufous-headed Hornbill month. A lot is still to be done, research and partnership with communities works hand-in-hand and plays a big role in this conservation effort.



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