

# The Avifauna of Mt. Haponhaponon, Mantikil, Siaton, Negros Oriental, with Notes on Other Vertebrates

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Preliminary results on the surveys of the vertebrate fauna of Mt. Haponhaponon are presented. A total of 91 species of birds are known in the Mantikil area, 84 species of which are confirmed by this study. Some of the birds confirmed are of conservation interest. A few mammalian, reptilian and amphibian fauna were also noted. Continued clearing of the forest for agriculture is the prevalent threat to these resources. Immediate conservation measures are thus needed to protect the forest from degradation.

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**KEYWORDS:** avifauna, ornithology, vertebrates, Negros, endemic, threatened species

## INTRODUCTION

The Philippines is among the megadiverse countries in the world due to its archipelagic nature and complex geological history (Ong, Afuang, & Rosell-Ambal, 2002).

Negros Island is part of the Negros-Panay biogeographic region and is home to several endemic species and subspecies. There is about 4% of forest remaining on Negros (Peterson, Ball & Brady, 2000), but may continue to decline as most of the lowland forests have been cleared for various reasons that include shifting agriculture and illegal timber poaching.

The dipterocarp-dominated forest in Mantikil, known as Mt. Haponhaponon massif, is among the old-growth remnants on Negros although the periphery shows a certain degree of degradation.

This paper highlights the importance of the remaining forest in Mantikil as habitat for threatened and endemic vertebrates with emphasis on the avifauna.

## **Ornithological Studies on Negros Island**

Brooks et al. (1992) summarized the ornithological works on Negros prior to 1991. Subsequent works include Paalan (1993) in Cuernos de Negros, Paguntalan, Pedregosa and Gadiana (2000) in some sites of Negros including Mantikil, and Paguntalan, Pedregosa and Gadiana (2000) in Banban, Ayungon. In the Northern part of Negros, ornithological studies were conducted by Turner, Slade and Ledesma (2002) and Turner, Tamblyn, Dray, Ledesma, Maunder and Raines (2003). Several birding trips have also been done, including Woods, Hutchinson and Adcock (2003) and Wild Bird Club of the Philippines members in 2007, listing the species in the area.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Description of the study area**

Haponhaponon is located southwest of Mt. Talinis (*Figure 1*).<sup>1</sup> It is separated from the latter by extensive grassland plain. In this area, the headwaters and tributaries of the Siaton and Canaway Rivers are located. The forest is primarily composed of lauan (*Shorea* spp.) and almaciga (*Agathis philippensis*) in the lower portions and throughout the slopes while various unidentified species of the *Podocarpus* (*maribojoc*, *palua-china*, etc.) dominate the upper ridges at higher elevations ca 1200 masl. Canopy height ranges from 15-25m with maximum diameter at breast-height (dbh) being 1.5m. The entire area is surrounded by pastureland (with cogon *Imperata cylindrica* as the dominant plant), farmland and kaingin. These anthropogenic activities have resulted in landslides; some of the newly constructed roads are about to slide as indicated by the presence of cracks. Most of the farms and pastureland are owned by a few subsistence farmers who have cleared portions of the forest for cultivation. Further, protection of this remaining forest is not apparent; insurgents inhabit the area.<sup>2</sup>



*Figure 1. Map of Cuernos de Negros mountain range showing the study site (see arrow). Source: Worldwind.*

## Field techniques

Birds were surveyed along existing trails with the aid of binoculars for identification using the field guide *Birds of the Philippines* by Kennedy et al. (2000). In addition, calls of some birds were recorded using TCM-Sanyo micro-cassette recorder for verification and documentation purposes. On occasion, calls were imitated to aid in confirming identity of some species. List of birds follows the sequence in Kennedy et al. (2000).

Mammals were not surveyed intensively due to the apparent security problem in the area as overnight stay was not permitted by the Philippine Army. I relied instead on noting tracks and fecal remains of mammals (primarily the non-volant mammals).

The reptiles and amphibians were also surveyed through cruise method, but were not well represented in this report. Detailed surveys including quadrat method were thus precluded for safety reasons. Calls of some species were also recorded for later verification. Identification of amphibians incidentally observed during visits follows Alcalá and Brown (1998) while that of reptiles follow Brown and Alcalá (1978, 1980), Alcalá (1986) and *Herpwatch Philippines* (HWP 2008).

## Ethnobiological surveys

Reliable community members were also interviewed through informal oral interviews to supplement data obtained from the field.

## RESULTS

A total of 91 species of birds are thus known from the area and surrounding forest remnants, 84 of which were confirmed by this study. With relatively shorter duration of the study, this survey was able to record eight threatened species (based on IUCN criteria as evaluated by BirdLife International 2008) (Table 1). These include the following species: Walden's Hornbill *Aceros waldeni* (Critically Endangered), Negros Bleeding-Heart *Gallicolumba keayi* (Critically Endangered), White-throated Jungle-flycatcher *Rhinomyias albigularis* (Endangered), Negros Striped-babbler *Stachyris nigrorum* (Endangered), Visayan Hornbill *Penelopides panini* (Endangered), White-winged Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina ostenta* (Vulnerable), and the Visayan Flowerpecker *Dicaeum haematostictum* (Vulnerable).

## DISCUSSION

*Birds.* The presence of the above-mentioned threatened species warrants the value of the site for immediate conservation action. On March 15, 2009 at least two nests of *A. waldeni* were found by the locals of Mantikil. Unfortunately, these nests have been robbed by the locals for the pet trade. It is interesting to note that illegal collection of this species is still problematic on Negros.

Another species whose whereabouts remain undocumented is the Coelestial Monarch *Hypothymis coelestis rabori*, which was known only in 1953 from Basay (Brooks et al.1992). I also received reports from the locals as well as from a birding guide (R. Vendiola, personal communication) that it was last seen in Cang-antas on the northwestern side of the massif, but to date, this cannot be confirmed due to insurgency problems.

The Negros Bleeding-heart pigeon *Gallicolumba keayi* was seen flying between secondary forests and reforested lots during the surveys. Its occurrence in a reforested forest patch might be due to food patchiness (BirdLife International, 2008). Woods et al. (2003) also noted its occurrence in Canaway forest which is also part of the Haponhaponon massif. Cariño (2007) provided additional

information on the ecology, distribution and conservation of this species on Negros Island.

I was able to visit Nagoro, a forest patch in Mantikil with an elevation of ca 650 masl, where three specimens of the Flame-templed Babbler *Dascycrotapha speciosa* were obtained (see accounts in BirdLife International, 2001). Unfortunately, efforts to locate this species have been unfruitful; the site seemed degraded and the vicinity has been replaced by cogon and patches of gmelina trees (*Gmelina arborea*).

### Notes on other vertebrates

*Mammals.* Tracks and fecal matter of the following mammals were photographed during my visit: Visayan Warty Pig *Sus cebifrons* (Critically Endangered), Visayan Spotted Deer *Cervus alfredi* (Endangered), Visayan Leopard Cat *Prionailurus bengalensis rabori* (Least Concern), Long-tailed Macaque *Macaca fascicularis* (Common) and Common palm civet *Paradoxurus hermaphroditus* (Common). It is possible that other important species such as the Negros Shrew (*Crocidura negrina*) occur in the area. Bats were not yet surveyed intensively and thus were not detailed in this report. Cariño (2004) reported 11 species in the surrounding area including those of conservation interest such as the Philippine Pygmy Fruit Bat *Haplonycteris fisheri* (Vulnerable), Hary Fruit Bat *Harpyionycteris whiteheadi*, Philippine Tube-nosed Fruit Bat *Ncytimene rabori* and Greater Bamboo Bat *Tylonycteris robustula* (new island record for Negros).

*Amphibians and Reptiles.* The herpetofauna of the area needs intensive survey. I noted only a few species, probably indicating an underestimate due to security reason. Commonly encountered species of amphibians include *Platymantis dorsalis*, *P. hazelae*, and *Limnonectes visayanus*. R. Vendiola photographed two interesting unidentified frogs belonging to *Rana* and *Platymantis* genera. These appeared localized to the site but this needs confirmation. With his permission, the following is a description based on his photos: the unidentified ranid frog has yellowish dorsum with black round spots, black side of body and with cyst (though this is not a taxonomic character) of ca 2 cm on the antero-dorsal portion of the vent, above the cloaca and the platymantine frog has uniform dark brown body. Reptiles noted include *Brachemelys* sp., *Lipinia* sp., *Draco spilopterus*,

Gekko spp. and Sphenomorphous spp. Several species of snakes such as the *Python reticularis* are also expected. Security problems and lack of collecting permit, however, precluded me to examine these species very closely.

*Threats.* The remaining dipterocarp forest in Haponhaponon, Mantikil is threatened by slash-and-burn farming or kaingin, which is encroaching each year (*Figure 2*).



*Figure 2. View of the forest in Mantikil.* (Note the encroaching forest clearings).

Large mammals such as the Visayan Spotted Deer and the Visayan Warty Pig are further hunted. In some cases, captured deer and pigs are either sold or consumed locally (R. Vendiola pers. comm.). In fact, one captive Visayan Warty Pig in Bacong was captured in Mantikil in 2006 (*Figure 3*). Conservation of these large mammals is of immense importance given their restricted range (Oliver, 1995) and conservation status (see IUCN, 2008). The captive individual shown in *Figure 3* is clearly a pure breed of the species *S. cebifrons*.





Figure 3. A Visayan Warty Pig (*Sus cebefrons*) in captivity from Mantikil.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> The author as well visited some sites in Southern Negros such as in Mt. Talinis and surrounding areas of Balinsasayao (Bucol, unpub.).

<sup>2</sup> The study site was visited on 5, 21-23 May 2008 and 21-23 February 2009.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report was made possible through the support of the following organizations and individuals: Desmond Allen and Jon Hornbuckle who reviewed early drafts of the manuscript; SUAKCREM for access to available literature; Honey Lu Fund for Conservation and Exploration of the Wild Bird Club of the Philippines (WBCP) and Haribon Foundation for additional funding; Dave Pitman who sponsored one birding trip, and Rene Vendiola who guided the author in all trips and provided security clearances from the police and armed forces. The Philippine Army (79th IB) and the Philippine National Police (Siaton) provided me the permission to visit the site. I am also indebted to unknown elements of the New People's Army for considering my team a threat enabling us to gain access to the area. I am also thankful to my wife Libibeth for being supportive of this project.

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Table 1.

**Checklist of birds observed in Haponhaponon, Mantikil and surrounding areas.**

Common Name	Scientific Name	Reported By	AB	
			Early Accounts	
			2008	2009
Brahminy Kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>	P	X	X
Besra	<i>Accipiter virgatus</i>	P	R	
Japanese Sparrow-hawk	<i>Accipiter gularis</i>	P	R	
Black-shouldered Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>			X
Crested Serpent-Eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>	P	X	X
<b>Philippine Hawk-Eagle, Vu</b>	<i>Spizaetus philippensis</i>		R	
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		R	
Red Junglefowl	<i>Gallus gallus</i>	P	X	X
Barred Buttonquail	<i>Turnix suscitator</i>		X	X
Pink-necked Green-Pigeon	<i>Treron vernans</i>		X	X
<b>White-eared Brown-Dove</b>	<i>Phapitreron leucotis</i>	P	X	X
<b>Yellow-breasted Fruit-Dove</b>	<i>Ptilinopus occipitalis</i>	P	X	X
Black-chinned Fruit-Dove	<i>Ptilinopus leclancheri</i>	P	X	
<b>Pink-bellied Imperial-Pigeon, NT</b>	<i>Ducula poliocephala</i>	P	X	
<b>Green Imperial-Pigeon</b>	<i>Ducula aenea</i>	P	X	X
Metallic Pigeon	<i>Columba vitiensis</i>		X	
Philippine Cuckoo-Dove	<i>Macropygia tenuirostris</i>		X	X
Common Emerald Dove	<i>Chalcophaps indica</i>	P	X	X
<b>Negros Bleeding-heart En</b>	<i>Gallucolumba keayi</i>	W	X	X
<b>Blue-crowned Racquet-tail</b>	<i>Prioniturus discurus</i>	P	X	X
Brush Cuckoo	<i>Cacomantis variolosus</i>		X	X
Plaintive Cuckoo	<i>Cacomantis merulinus</i>	P	X	
<b>Philippine Coucal</b>	<i>Centropus viridis</i>	P	X	X
Grass Owl	<i>Tyto capensis</i>		R	
<b>Philippine Scops-Owl</b>	<i>Otus megalotis</i>		X	
<b>Philippine Hawk-Owl</b>	<i>Ninox philippensis</i>	P	X	
<b>Philippine Frogmouth</b>	<i>Batrachostomus septimus</i>	P	X	
<b>Philippine Nightjar</b>	<i>Caprimulgus manillensis</i>	P	X	
Glossy Swiftlet	<i>Collocalia esculenta</i>	P	X	X
<b>Pygmy Swiftlet</b>	<i>Collocalia troglodytes</i>	P	X	X
<b>Philippine Needletail</b>	<i>Mearnsia picina</i>	P	X	
Purple Needletail	<i>Hirundapus celebensis</i>		X	
Dollarbird	<i>Eurystomus orientalis</i>	P	X	X
White-collared Kingfisher	<i>Todirhamphus chloris</i>	P	X	X
<b>Spotted Wood-Kingfisher</b>	<i>Actenoides lindsayi</i>	P	X	
Blue-throated Bee-eater	<i>Merops viridis</i>	P	X	X
Blue-tailed Bee-eater	<i>Merops philippinus</i>	P	X	X
<b>Visayan Tarctic, En</b>	<i>Penelopides panini</i>	P	X	X
<b>Walden's Hornbill, CR</b>	<i>Aceros waldeni</i>	P	X	
Coppersmith Barbet	<i>Megalaima haemacephala</i>	P	X	X
<b>Philippine Pygmy Woodpecker</b>	<i>Dendrocopos maculatus</i>	P	X	
White-bellied Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus javensis</i>		X	

Continued...

Common Name	Scientific Name	Reported By		
		Early Accounts	AB	
			2008	2009
Hooded Pitta	<i>Pitta sordida</i>	P	X	X
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	P	X	X
Pacific Swallow	<i>Hirundo tahitica</i>	P	X	X
Bar-bellied Cuckoo-shrike	<i>Coracina striata</i>	P	X	X
<b>White-winged</b>				
<b>Cuckoo-shrike, Vu</b>	<i>Coracina ostenta</i>	P	X	X
Yellow-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus goiavier</i>	P	X	X
<b>Philippine Bulbul</b>	<i>Ixos philippinus</i>	P	X	X
<b>Balicassiao</b>	<i>Dicrurus balicassius</i>	P	X	X
<b>Philippine Oriole</b>	<i>Oriolus steerii</i>	P	X	
Black-naped Oriole	<i>Oriolus chinensis</i>	P	X	
Large-billed Crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>	P	X	X
<b>Elegant Tit</b>	<i>Parus elegans</i>	P	X	X
Velvet-fronted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta frontalis</i>	P	X	X
<b>Stripe-breasted Rhabdornis</b>	<i>Rhabdornis inornatus</i>	P		X
<b>Stripe-headed Rhabdornis</b>	<i>Rhabdornis mystacalis</i>	P		
<b>Flame-templed Babbler</b>	<i>Dascycrotapha speciosa</i>	BL, P		
<b>Negros Striped-Babbler, En</b>	<i>Stachyris nigrorum</i>	BL, W	X	X
White-browed Shortwing	<i>Brachypteryx montana</i>	P	X	X
<b>White-browed Shama</b>	<i>Copsychus luzoniensis</i>	P	X	X
Oriental Magpie-robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>	P	X	X
Pied Bushchat	<i>Saxicola caprata</i>	P	X	X
Mountain Leaf-Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trivirgatus</i>	P	X	X
Tawny Grassbird	<i>Megalurus timoriensis</i>	P	X	X
Striated Grassbird	<i>Megalurus palustris</i>	P	X	
<b>Philippine Tailorbird</b>	<i>Orthotomus castaneiceps</i>	P	X	X
Bright-capped Cisticola	<i>Cisticola exilis</i>		X	X
Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>		X	X
<b>White-throated</b>				
<b>Jungle-Flycatcher, En</b>	<i>Rhinomyias albigularis</i>	BL	X	X
Mangrove-blue Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis rufigastra</i>		X	
Grey-streaked Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa griseisticta</i>		X	X
Mountain Verditer-Flycatcher	<i>Eumyias panayensis</i>	P	X	X
Mugimaki Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula mugimaki</i>		X	
Citrine Canary-Flycatcher	<i>Culicicapa helianthea</i>	P	X	
<b>Blue-headed Fantail</b>	<i>Rhipidura cyaniceps</i>	P	X	X
Black-naped Monarch	<i>Hypothymis azurea</i>	P	X	X
<b>Celestial Monarch, Vu</b>	<i>Hypothymis coelestis</i>		R	
White-vented Whistler	<i>Pachycephala homeyeri</i>	P	X	X
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		X	
Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>		X	
White-breasted Wood-swallow	<i>Artamus leucorhynchus</i>	P	X	X
Long-tailed Shrike	<i>Lanius schach</i>	P	X	X
Brown Shrike	<i>Lanius cristatus</i>			X
<b>Coletto</b>	<i>Sarcops calvus</i>	P	X	X
Olive-backed Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris jugularis</i>	P	X	X
Crimson Sunbird	<i>Aethopyga siparaja</i>	P	X	X