

# Birdwatching in the Philippines

The Philippines is a recognized mega-diversity area with a very high percentage of endemism. With 200 of over 600 bird species in the country listed as endemic, the Philippines positions itself as the newest birdwatching hotspot! Get on the bird trail and discover the rare Cebu flowerpecker, the colourful Palawan peacock pheasant, and the majestic Philippine eagle, among others.

From marine life, to flora and fauna, and now birdwatching, the rarity and diversity of the country's wildlife is legendary. The endemism in the Philippines is a fitting symbol of the country's uniqueness in terms of what it can offer. A country of various landscapes and experiences, the Philippines stands firm in its promise to take you beyond the usual.

## Summary Description of the Top 27 Birdwatching Sites

### Pagudpud, Ilocos Norte (Jump-off Point: Laoag)

The municipality of Pagudpud in the northwestern part of the Philippines has three sites for birdwatching: Kalbario-Patapat Natural Park, Barangay (village) Pancian, and Saud Beach Resort.

The lagoon behind the Saud Beach Resort is considered as one of the easiest sites to see the Philippine Duck. Other species found are the resident White-browed Crane, Yellow Bittern and the migratory Northern Shoveler and Tufted Duck.

### Mt. Polis Protected Landscape, Cordillera Administrative Region (Jump-off Point: Banaue)

Mt. Polis is a thick-forested area in the Cordillera Administrative Region. The site offers easy, roadside birding where one can encounter endemic species such as the gregarious Chestnut-faced Babbler and the solitary Mountain Shrike. The many ravines that characterize the rough terrain of the Cordillera Mountain Range make birding easy because the tree canopies are almost at eye-level.

For the more serious birders in search of the elusive Whiskered Pitta, they may have to take the trails inside mossy forests on usually steep slopes.

### Hamut Camp, Cagayan (Jump-off Point: Tuguegarao)

Hamut Camp, on the slopes of Mt. Dos Cuernos in the Sierra Madre Mountain Range, is one of the most exciting birdwatching destinations in the Philippines. There is a high probability of spotting an amazing variety of rarely seen endemics such as the Whiskered Pitta, Luzon Wren-Babbler, Flame-breasted Fruit-Dove and Blue-breasted Flycatcher.

It is one of the most physically-challenging sites, but the rewards more than compensate for the gruelling trek needed as birders feast their eyes on probably the most sightings of rare Luzon-endemics.

### Hundred Islands National Park, Pangasinan (Jump-off Point: Manila or Clark)

With 123 small, limestone islands and islets, the area has been attracting visitors who want to see the so-called hundred islands and swim in the clear waters of Lingayen Gulf in the north-eastern part of the Philippines.

Birdwatching in the Hundred Islands National Park offers the unique opportunity to see birds while in a boat. Bird colonies harbor terns and herons in large numbers. Other islands that play host to other species such as pittas and flycatchers can be visited and trekked by birders. Another notable find is the Roseate Tern.

### Bangrin Marine Protected Area, Bani, Pangasinan (Jump-off Point: Manila or Clark)

For the sheer number of migratory birds and the proximity one can get to the roosting site, the Bangrin Marine Protected Area in the municipality of Bani, Pangasinan is an ideal birdwatcher's and bird photographer's paradise.

Other types of resident birds can also be encountered in the mainland. These include bitterns, shrikes and cisticolas. With the wide expanse of the mudflats, it is not surprising to discover new records for Bani.

### Subic Bay Freeport Zone, Zambales (Jump-off Point: Manila or Clark)

This former American Naval Base sits on a huge swathe of protected lowland forest area and is home to a very good number of bird species, many of which are endemic to the Philippines. This is also considered an easy birding site as the fliers can be seen from the road sides and forest edges. There are three specific areas where one can encounter the most birds: Hill 394, Nabasan Area and Triboa.

On a single birding day, there is a good chance to see a combination of raptors, parrots, coucals, malkohas and hornbills.

### Balanga City, Bataan (Jump-off Point: Manila or Clark)

Bataan Peninsula lies in what is known as the East Asian – Australian Flyway. Balanga City, the capital of Bataan, is an attractive stop-over for migratory birds.

The three villages (barangays) of Puerto Rivas, Tortugas and Sibacan are the most popular stop-overs and feeding grounds for thousands of migratory birds that include gulls, terns, herons, and egrets.

### Mt. Palay-Palay National Park, Cavite (Jump-off Point: Manila)

The National Park is the largest chunk of lowland forest nearest to Manila and the only remaining forest in Cavite. The park is host to several interesting forest dwellers and raptors such as kites and the endemic Philippine Falconet. Its endemic large residents are the rufous hornbill together with the Scale-feathered and the Red-crested malkohas.

Another birdwatching site near Mt. Palay-Palay is Caylabne Bay Resort where one can see Asian Glossy Starlings and Philippine Ducks.

### Candaba Marsh, Pampanga (Jump-off Point: Manila or Clark)

Candaba Marsh is 32,000 hectares of wetlands and is the first protected area where migratory and endemic birds flock by the thousands. It serves as a wintering area for migratory birds where about 60 species can be found, including Garganeys, Northern Pintails, Northern Shovelers, herons, egrets and Philippine ducks.

Candaba becomes more interesting as new species for the Philippines were recorded in recent months including the Eurasian Spoonbill and the Black-browed Reed Warbler.

### Las Piñas-Parañaque Critical Habitat and Ecotourism Zone, Manila (Jump-off Point: Manila)

The recently-declared protected area was designed to help preserve one of the few feeding and resting grounds of migratory birds using the East Asian Flyway. Encompassing more than 100 hectares of mangroves, coastal plains and tidal lagoons, thousands of birds fill the site during the months of September to March. Egrets, herons, terns make a noticeable presence. Other species include plovers and the Siberian Rubythroat.

### Mt. Makiling Forest Reserve, Laguna (Jump-off Point: Manila)

About 65 kilometres south of Manila is Mt. Makiling, an extinct volcano covered by a lush rainforest ecosystem. Here one finds 2,000 flowering plants, 45 mammal species and 181 species of birds, many of which are endemic. The natural terrain like mudsprings, waterfalls and forest trees contribute in making the site an ideal bird habitat.

Some of the best-looking birds in the Philippines can be found on this mountain. The Luzon-endemic Ashy Ground-Thrush could be a challenging quest in Mt. Makiling.

### Villa Escudero, Quezon (Jump-off Point: Manila)

Established in 1872, Villa Escudero is a coconut plantation which has been subsequently converted into a resort. Although dominated by coconuts in most parts of the estate, the site has some good pockets of greenery that have become the sanctuary of many forest bird species including grassland birds, endemic kingfishers, and forest birds.

### Bicol River Estuary, Bicol (Jump-off Point: Naga)

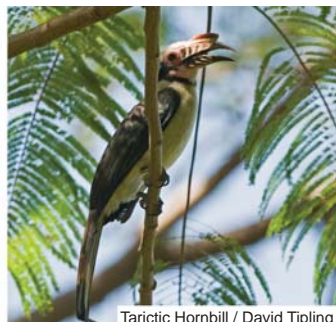
The Bicol River Estuary is composed of the municipalities of Magarao and Cabusao, Camarines Sur. The coast of Cabusao hosts one of the largest numbers of migratory ducks and waders in the country. The wetland area of Magarao on the other hand has one of the largest concentrations of the Wandering Whistling Duck. Grassland birds are common in agricultural areas. Birders will have to ride on a paddle boat to reach the site, thus there is a good probability of seeing other species such as kingfishers, egrets and other water birds.



Blue-naped Parrot / Tina Mallari



Philippine Hawk-Owl Nicky Icarangal



Tarctic Hornbill / David Tipling



Palawan Flowerpecker / Neon Rossel



Red-crested Malkoha / Armando Sumintac



Philippine Oriole / Ivan Sarenas

### Sablayan, Occidental Mindoro (Jump-off Point: San Jose)

The municipality of Sablayan is host to a number of endemics like the Mindoro Bleeding-heart, the Black-hooded Coucal and the Mindoro Tarctic Hornbill. The scenic Lake Libua is the main attraction in the area where the Philippine Duck, Brahminy Kite and Crested Serpent-Eagle are commonly seen species by the lakeshore.

There are also two birdwatching sites easily accessible from Sablayan such as Pandan Grande Island and Apo Reef Marine Natural Park. Pandan Grande Island promises easy birding for Tabon Scrubfowls, Common Emerald-Doves while Apo Reef, world renowned as a diving destination, hosts Nicobar Pigeons and Pied Imperial-Pigeons.

### Lake Danao, Palawan (Jump-off Point: El Nido)

This is the only natural freshwater lake in Palawan whose area covers about 600 hectares and was formed out of volcanic activities. Its forests are still intact and wildlife exists with little disturbance from humans. In many places around the lake, the forests hug the coastlines, contributing to the pristine character of the site.

The lake is home to flocks of Philippine Ducks and Wandering-Whistling Ducks. Raptors species such as White-bellied Sea-Eagle, Brahminy Kite and Osprey are commonly seen. The three-kilometer trail from the main road to the lake also serves as good roadside birding where Yellow-throated Leafbird, Palawan Tit, Palawan Hornbill and other forest species may be seen.

### Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park, Palawan (Jump-off Point: Puerto Princesa)

This major tourist attraction is popular because of its 8.2-kilometer underground river, a portion of which is navigable by paddle boats. Declared as a national park in 1971, the site has maintained its natural forest cover allowing wildlife, including birds, to live unharmed from any large-scale human disturbance.

For birdwatching, the park is a major site where one can easily encounter endemic species such as the Palawan Peacock Pheasant and the Palawan Hornbill. These species are restricted in the island of Palawan.

### Rasa Island, Palawan (Jump-off Point: Narra)

Rasa Island is a story of success and continuing struggle in bird conservation. The Philippine Cockatoo used to be fairly common in most parts of the country, but habitat degradation and the uncontrolled pet trade have reduced its population to few islands, including Palawan.

In 1998, the local government of Narra and the Katala Foundation embarked on a significant program designed to help save the remaining cockatoos in the area. The project also enabled the protection of the entire Rasa Island from further degradation and conservation of other bird species that count, among others, the Mantanani Scops Owl and the Blue-headed Racquet-tail.

### Mt. Kanlaon National Park, Negros Occidental (Jump-off Point: Bacolod)

Mt. Kanlaon serves as a symbolic wildlife refuge and a highly-prized trekking and camping destination, offering very impressive forest and volcanic landscapes. Mt. Kanlaon is host to some of the elusive endemic species which include the Negros Bleeding-heart and the Flame-templed Babbler.

The most frequented birding station at the Mt. Kanlaon National Park is the 24-hectare Mambukal Mountain Resort. The limited development plan of the resort provides the environment for forest species to thrive in the area, which include Balicassiao, Philippine Cuckoo-Dove, Orange-bellied Flowerpecker and a large colony of Pacific Swallows under the bridge near the bat roosting site, among others.

### Balinasayao Twin Lakes Natural Park, Negros Oriental (Jump-off Point: Dumaguete)

The Twin Lakes of Balinasayao and Danao is a protected natural park and home to an expansive ecosystem of great biodiversity. The breathtaking scenery is set amidst lush tropical vegetation, with age-old trees, giant ferns, wild vines and other rare flora. The tallest tree in the Philippines, the Almociga tree, can still be found here.

The wide forest cover allows for the wildlife to thrive in the area. Raptors such as Brahminy Kite and Osprey can be seen gliding above the lakes while Crimson Sunbird, Flaming Sunbird and Orange-bellied Flowerpecker are easily seen in many parts of this birding site. An impressive forest trail tracing a good part of the lakes' circumference reveals other interesting endemic species such as the White-winged Cuckoo-shrike, Visayan Tarctic hornbill and the Visayan Flowerpecker.

### Alcoy Forest, Cebu (Jump-off Point: Cebu City)

This 800-hectare area of residual and regenerated forest is home to highly endangered and interesting endemic species such as the Black Shama and the Cebu Flowerpecker. Known for its melodious calls, the Black Shama has been attracting both foreign and local bird enthusiasts. About 91 species of birds have been recorded in Alcoy Forest.

Cebu is known to host a good number of endemic species and sub species. There are other species that were previously listed as extinct but were later rediscovered in recent years. The most notable being the Cebu Flowerpecker. The eight Cebu subspecies include the Coppersmith Barbet, Orange-bellied Flowerpecker, Amethyst Brown Dove, Streak-breasted Bulbul, White-vented Whistler, Everett's White Eye, Elegant Tit, and the Philippine Hanging Parakeet.

### Olango Island Wildlife Sanctuary, Cebu (Jump-off Point: Mactan Island)

Olango Island showcases an impressive number of migratory species including vulnerable and near threatened species such as the Chinese Egret and Asian Dowitcher. The area most visited by the migratory birds has been declared as a 920-hectare sanctuary that protects both the birds and the habitat that comprise of mangroves, sea grasses, and mudflats.

Olango is a very significant site for the migratory bird as it serves as a refueling station for many individuals on their way to their migration destination. Many individuals also choose to remain in the area instead of completing their migration route to the south.

### Rajah Sikatuna Protected Landscape, Bohol (Jump-off Point: Tagbilaran)

Rajah Sikatuna Protected Landscape is classified as an Important Bird Area and has been a well-known birding destination frequented by foreign birders because of possible sightings of threatened and restricted-range species of the Mindanao and Eastern Visayas Endemic Bird Area. These include two species of hornbills namely the Mindanao Tarctic and Mindanao subspecies of the Rufous Hornbill. Topping the list of must-see species in this site are the Wattled Broadbill, Steere's Pitta and the Yellow-breasted Tailorbird.

### Sohoton Natural Bridge National Park, Samar (Jump-off Point: Tacloban)

This 840-hectare nature reserve is renowned for its limestone formations, waterfalls, subterranean rivers and caves. Its limestone formations are sites to spot the Rufous Hornbill and Silvery Kingfisher.

Sohoton is a karst forest where wildlife thrive in good numbers. In addition to forest birds, a long river flanked by dense mangroves provides a roosting area for waders during high tide.

### Philippine Eagle Centre, Davao (Jump-off Point: Davao City)

The Philippine Eagle Centre, located at the foothills of the majestic Mt. Apo, is operated by the Philippine Eagle Foundation as a facility for the care and propagation of the endangered Philippine Eagle (*Pithechophaga jefferyi*). The centre houses 32 eagles, 18 of which were successfully bred through human intervention (captive-bred). At the centre, one can closely observe the remarkable eagle as well as other species such as Brahminy Kites and Indonesian Lorries.

### Mt. Kitanglad Range Natural Park, Bukidnon (Jump-off Point: Cagayan de Oro)

Mt. Kitanglad's forests and grasslands protect a sizeable population of flora and fauna endemic to the Philippines. Although the landscape has undergone changes through agriculture, Mt. Kitanglad is still the best known nesting site of the Philippine Eagle. A good number of unique flyers found only in the southern part of the country includes several species that are only known from the higher mountains in Mindanao, such as Mindanao Racquet-tail, Slaty-backed Jungle-Flycatcher, Red-eared Parrotfinch and Apo Myna.

### Agusan Marsh Wildlife Sanctuary, Agusan del Sur (Jump-off Point: Butuan)

Located at the heart of the Agusan River Basin, the Marsh is a vast complex of freshwater marshes with numerous small shallow lakes and ponds encompassing 14,835.989 hectares. Waterbirds such as Purple Herons and Black Bitterns are a common sight and endemic species such as the Silvery Kingfisher and the Philippine Duck also proliferate. Other species that are easily seen are the Pink-necked Green-Pigeon, Guaibero and Pied Triller.

### Pasonanca Natural Park, Zamboanga (Jump-off Point: Zamboanga City)

A natural park located right in the heart of the city, the Pasonanca Natural Park (PNP) comprises of a watershed and a buffer zone. The natural park showcases Mindanao-endemic species such as the Zamboanga Bulbul, White-eared Tailorbird and the Mindanao race of the Wattled Broadbill. Pasonanca Natural Park has three possible birdwatching stations: Intake, Cabonegro and Baluno Research Station.

More information on the birdwatching sites listed above can be found in "Birdwatching in the Philippines" Volumes 1 and 2 Guidebooks