

PRESS RELEASE

Kukang is involved in the fight against illegal hunting in the Philippines. According to Czech conservationists, many species of marine life in the Philippines are at risk of extinction earlier than scientists have calculated.

22 May 2023 – The Philippines have a key position in terms of biodiversity. They are characterized by a high degree of endemism and are located in the Coral Triangle ecoregion, which is often called the “Amazon of the Sea” because of its ecological importance. Due to climate change, population growth and destructive fishing methods, especially by small-scale fishermen, their biodiversity is critically endangered. Scientists have predicted that the global extinction of wild seafood may occur in 2048. Czech conservationists led by Kukang Rescue Program’s director and Ostrava Zoo field worker František Příbrský, Tomáš Ouhel from NGO Lestari and Liberec Zoo, and Lucie Čizmářová from the Kukang Program and Olomouc Zoo with their teams, who are intensively devoted to the issue, point out that this catastrophe may occur in the Philippines much earlier. Together with the non-profit organization Vesna Panglao Conservation and with the support of the Embassy of the Czech Republic in Manila, they managed to establish cooperation with the Philippine National Police - Maritime Group, with whom they conducted several successful raids around the islands of Bohol and Cebu against smaller fishermen using destructive fishing techniques such as poisons, explosives or trawls. The Czechs want to help improve access to biodiversity protection in the Philippines, but they also call on tourists to be more responsible.

Globally, 11-26 million tons of fish are illegally caught every year, and scientists have calculated that if this trend continues, wild seafood will be wiped out by 2048. But in the Philippines, where small-scale community fisheries play a key role and even dominate commercial fisheries¹, it may be much earlier. The Philippines are facing the largest population growth in the entire Southeast Asia² with an average annual fish consumption of 36 kg per 1 inhabitant. At the same time, the global average fish consumption is 22 kilograms, which points to the Philippines’ dependence on fish. In addition, the Philippines rank among medium-developed societies that may have a greater negative impact on marine ecosystems than both developed and underdeveloped societies. Underdeveloped societies often operate traditional, low-volume fisheries that have a less negative impact on the marine environment and resources. Highly developed societies, on the other hand, have access to more sophisticated technologies and management practices that can reduce the impact of fishing on marine ecosystems³. *“Fishing in the Philippines is not highly regulated and difficult enforcement of regulations makes it difficult to implement sustainable fishing practices. Illegal and devastating practices such as dynamite and cyanide fishing are common in the archipelago⁴. These practices destroy entire coral reefs, kill*

entire fish populations, including non-target animal species, which we call by-catch,” explains Tomáš Ouhel, adviser for nature protection and research at the Liberec Zoo.

In the past year, this team of conservationists managed to accomplish several successful raids in the region when they helped capture and arrest Greed, a key member of an Indonesian smuggling gang that was trading in orangutans, gibbons, slow lorises and other endangered species. They followed up on this international success by catching a group of hunters of the critically endangered Nias Hill Mynas. Currently, they are also intensively devoted to the issue of illegal fishing and the protection of biodiversity in the Philippines. *“In order to ensure the long-term health of marine ecosystems, it is essential to implement sustainable fishing practices, implement closures of selected areas, monitor them and enforce strict regulations. These measures can also bring food security to coastal communities in the more than 7,000 Philippine islands that depend on fishing,”* stated František Příbrský, coordinator of conservation projects at the Ostrava Zoo and director of The Kukang Rescue Program, adding that exposing and combating illegal hunting and trade in endangered species is a new important activity of the Kukang program.. You can watch a video depicting the cooperation of the Czech conservationist and the national maritime police PNP Maritime Group in the Philippines [here](#). *“In the field of nature conservation, the national maritime police Maritime Group Bohol has been cooperating with the Vesna Panglao Conservation organization for several years, and we are glad that we now have the opportunity to also use the partnership of zoologists Příbrský and Ouhel. Czech conservationists help us set up an effective strategy to protect marine biodiversity from illegal fishermen, but they also participate in so-called simex (simulation exercises) or provide us with tracking equipment such as drones and satellite phones that effectively monitor activities in the marine waters of Bohol province,”* summarized the activities PCPT Stephen C Boniba, station chief of Maritime Group Bohol.

Let's not be indifferent

Czech conservationists with their teams want to raise public awareness about responsible tourism, unsustainable fishing in the Philippines or the archipelago's climate problems, which are behind the approaching ecological disaster. At the same time, they want to encourage society to take a responsible approach. Therefore, in cooperation with Vesna Panglao Conservation, they have compiled a set of advice and tips for everyone who is not indifferent to the fate of our planet. The infographic can be downloaded [here](#).

The Ostrava Zoo, the main partner of the Kukang Program, also offers an opportunity to help Philippine biodiversity. The zoo dedicates its annual charity run www.behzooostrava.cz to the non-profit organization Vesna Panglao Conservation, which focuses on the protection and restoration of the destroyed coral reef in the Philippines and the education of local communities. Apart from the Ostrava Zoo (František Příbrský), the project to save biodiversity in the Philippines is also supported by the Liberec Zoo (Tomáš Ouhel), the Olomouc Zoo (Lucie Čížmářová) and the Ústí nad Labem Zoo (František Příbrský).

The attached photos may be freely used for print, internet and television news purposes.
Credits: archive of Vesna Panglao Conservation

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¹Philippines: total production volume of fishing 2021 | Statista. Statista - The Statistics Portal for Market Data, Market Research and Market Studies [online]. Copyright © Statista 2023 [cit. 01.05.2023]. Dostupné z: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/975932/fisheries-fishing-production-volume-philippines/>

²Population growth in South East Asia | TheGlobalEconomy.com. Global economy, world economy | TheGlobalEconomy.com [online]. Dostupné z: https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/population_growth/South-East-Asia/

³Halpern, B. S., Longo, C., Hardy, D., McLeod, K. L., Samhuri, J. F., Katona, S. K., ... & Zeller, D. (2014). An index to assess the health and benefits of the global ocean. Nature, 508(7495), 215-221

⁴Phillipines in: Asia-Pacific Journal of Ocean Law and Policy Volume 4 Issue 1 (2019) . Brill | Over three centuries of scholarly publishing [online]. Copyright © 2016 [cit. 01.05.2023]. Dostupné z: https://brill.com/view/journals/apoc/4/1/article-p97_97.xml

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