

Forests of Hope

Avoiding deforestation and combating climate change

Site profile

Mount Irid-Angelo, Philippines

The forests of the Philippines are one of the world's greatest biodiversity areas. They support the livelihoods of large numbers of indigenous people, and the ecosystem services on which dense human populations of Filipinos also depend. Mount Irid-Angelo, in the Sierra Madre Mountain Range on Luzon Island, supports one of the biggest expanses of forest in the country, including part of the water catchment for Manila. The site is threatened by logging and agricultural expansion, and is home to the magnificent Philippine Eagle. Recent developments in the country's forest policy bring an unprecedented opportunity to conserve large areas of this magnificent forest.

The photograph illustrates the large areas of intact forest on Mount Irid-Angelo (Photo: Haribon Foundation).



■ Basic information

Country: Philippines

Site name: Mount Irid-Angelo, Sierra Madre, Luzon

Location: Mt Irid and Mt Angelo are located on the boundaries between the provinces of Bulacan, Quezon and Rizal, about 40 km to the north-east of Metro Manila, in the southern Sierra Madre mountains. Mt Irid rises to 1,448 m and Mt Angelo to 1,315 m. Despite the close proximity to the city, there are very few roads into these rugged mountains, and they are sparsely populated. The site includes IBA PH020.

Site area: The forest at the project site covers 135,257 ha; around 35,000 ha is the initial target for Forests of Hope.

■ Biodiversity and current status

Luzon, the largest of the Philippine islands, is so biologically distinctive that it qualifies as an Endemic Bird Area in its own right. Three main mountain ranges are most important for endemic wildlife, and one of these is the Sierra Madre, which is the water catchment (and, through hydro power, a major part of the electricity supply) of the capital city, Manila.

The Sierra Madre has one of the largest remaining forest blocks, and one of the richest wildlife communities known from any forest area in the Philippines, but even there 83% of the forest present in the 1930s had been lost by the 1990s, with most of the remainder under logging concessions. Large-scale logging has now been cancelled, but the remaining forests are highly threatened by



The magnificent Philippine Eagle, flagship species and emblem of the Philippines, has been recorded in the Irid-Angelo Mountains. Photo: Nigel Voaden; www.rarebirdyearbook.com.

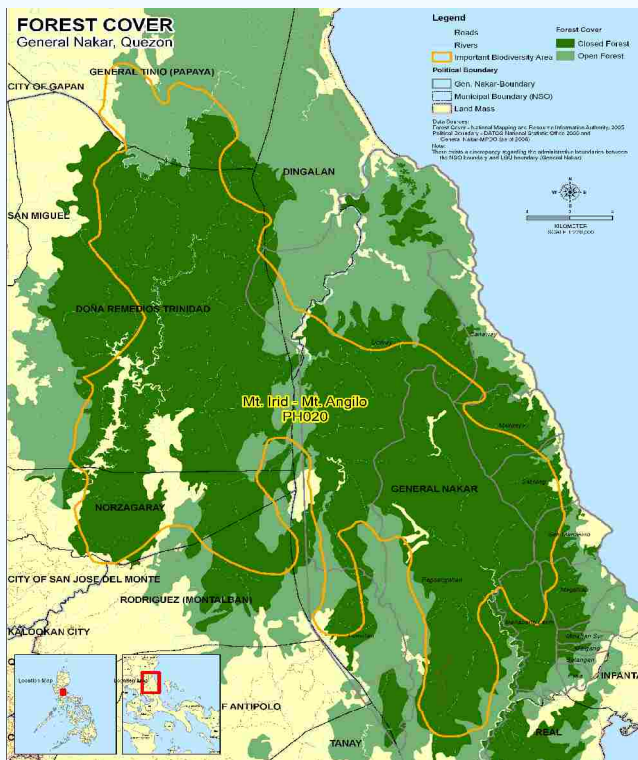
clearance. A significant stand of old-growth Dipterocarp forest has been located there, and the mountains are high enough to support areas of montane forest around their peaks, as well as the extensive lowland forests on their slopes. Initial surveys have revealed 88 bird and 17 mammal species, of which over 40% are endemic.

■ Current conservation approach

Over much of the site, there is effectively no conservation approach *per se*. A wide range of land tenure instruments are in place, including two Protected Areas declared by Presidential Proclamation 1636 in the 1970s (total of 42,375 ha but with little or no management or law enforcement), two Watershed Reservations (covering 50,000 ha), two areas with Certificates of Ancestral Domain Claims (166,000 ha of land and marine area of General Nakar, Quezon), and a privately-titled land area dating to Spanish times (Green Circle Resources Properties Inc., around 50,000 ha). The site is managed by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources in 3 municipalities, the Protected Area Management Board and the Kanan Watershed Management Council.

■ Threats

The main threat to the site is deforestation largely through illegal logging. Additional threats are small scale mining (gold and Calcium Carbonate in Bulacan), persistent slash



Map of Mount Irid and Mount Angelo, showing the site's location on Luzon and in the Philippines



The spectacular Philippine Pit Viper *Trimeresurus flavomaculatus* is endemic to the Philippines, and is found in the forests of the Sierra Madre including Mount Irid-Angelo. Photo: Haribon Foundation.

and burn (known locally as ‘kaingin’), on-going road constructions through the forests from the eastern coastal towns directly to Manila, proposed infrastructure development of large dams, unregulated collection of non-timber forest products, wildlife hunting for the pet trade and for food (especially affecting pigeons and doves, Philippine Hanging Parrots and malkohas). The volatile

security situation, with communist insurgents taking refuge in the mountains, has made these threats difficult to tackle, although successes elsewhere have shown that this can be addressed.

■ New conservation approach

The Haribon Foundation (BirdLife in the Philippines) has identified a well-forested area of 30-40,000 ha in the Irid-Angelo Mountains, which is ‘production forest’ gazetted under a special category that promotes restoration of degraded areas, indicating that legal obstacles that hinder restoration of production forest in other countries could be avoided. There is strong support for protecting and restoring the forest; almost a thousand people died in a landslide nearby in 2004 and the logging concession was revoked through the efforts of local people.

The combination of high biodiversity value, strong local support for sustainable forest management, and potentially high carbon emissions reductions (through both forest restoration and avoided deforestation over large areas) makes this programme extremely exciting. In more detail, the opportunity is presented by cancelled Integrated Forest Management Agreements and Timber License Agreements which could be proposed as extensions to existing Protected Areas, or as *Forests of Hope* under a new management category for restoration, similar to what has been developed by BirdLife in Indonesia (the Harapan



The Haribon Foundation and Luntian Youth Environmental Organization recently organised a nature camp in the forest for youths from three local high schools. Photo: Haribon Foundation.

Rainforest Project). This would allow new activities to reforest and restore degraded forest with different stakeholders. Given the enormous value of the ecological services of the forests, payment for environmental services has strong financing potential. Other initiatives under discussion include:

- development of a 'Restoration and ecological park' by the Local Government Unit
- establishment of monitoring system (with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources) using existing tools such as the Biodiversity Monitoring System, Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool and Haribon's IBA Monitoring System.

■ History and capacity of the BirdLife Partner

Haribon Foundation has the capacity, profile and local presence able to tackle an ambitious conservation initiative involving local communities and Government, and has a long history of conservation at the site and similar sites. This has included Community Resource Management Training (1988-1993) funded by Debt Swap (US/Japan) and a range of capacity building, planning and livelihood support activities. These have included providing assistance to strengthen governance structures for indigenous peoples, and working with local government



Scale-feathered Malkoha, found only on Luzon: one of the extraordinary endemic species at Mount Irid-Angelo, and threatened by hunting as well as deforestation. Photo: Pete Morris/BirdQuest.

and communities to carry out new Forest Land Use Planning processes. Currently Haribon is implementing the Governance and Local Development for Endangered Forests (GOLDEN Forests) programme, funded by the European Union from 2005 - 2010, aiming to reduce the deforestation rate in four target rainforest sites in the Philippines.

■ Detailed knowledge of the forest

Haribon has carried out important studies of deforestation, land use and carbon stocks; on current rates, emissions from this site alone are estimated at 0.46 million tC/year, around 1.7% of national emissions. Contacts with local stakeholders, are strong, and a good understanding of the local issues related to insurgency and indigenous peoples has been developed. GOLDEN Forests will be completed in 2010; through it, Haribon has initiated "rainforestation" (restoration) activities with great success, and also carried out resource valuation studies comparing different land uses. However, more work is needed to ensure the long-term conservation of the forest with reformed governance and sustainable financing, and this is the goal under the Forests of Hope programme.



The forest conservation work of the Haribon Foundation places strong emphasis on participatory planning based on thorough awareness-raising programmes. Photo: Haribon Foundation.

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