



Photo by Lorenzo Tan, Jr.

Philippine Cockatoo (*Cacatua haematuropygia*)

THE PHILIPPINE Cockatoo (*Cacatua haematuropygia*) is a species of the Psittacidae or parrot family. It is a treetop bird that has a heavy scimitar-like beak for cracking seeds and nuts, and excavating tree holes for nesting. It has a predominantly white plumage, which distinctly contrasts with the color of the forest, making it easy to spot in the dense foliage. A unique feature also is its conspicuous red under-tail covers. A regular size specimen measures 33 centimeters in length and weighs 0.29 kilogram. It feeds on the seeds and fruits of wild trees or, in cultivated areas, on rice or corn. The female normally lays two eggs, which hatch after about 24 days. Usually, it uses emergent trees 30-40 m tall as nesting sites, and coconut plantations on offshore islands as roosting sites. Cockatoos can live for more than 50 years.

The Philippine cockatoo is a national treasure because it is endemic to the country and the only cockatoo species found here. It used to be found in the Visayas and Sulu archipelago but can only be seen now in a few islands there. Its numbers are fast declining due to poaching, but small flocks are still found in Palawan particularly in St. Paul's Subterranean River National Park, in Pandanan Island and also within the El Nido-Taytay Managed Resource Protected Area.



Because it can mimic sounds and readily adapt to the presence of people, the Philippine Cockatoo makes a favorite household pet. It is one of the three most traded wildlife species in the Philippines; the two others are the Talking Mynah and the Blue-naped Parrot, which can also be found in Palawan.

There are probably only 300 to 800 birds left in Palawan, and an estimated 500 birds, on other Philippine Islands. Its unregulated collection and illegal trade, as well as habitat loss, account for its decreasing number. Its population declined 60 to 90 percent in the last 10 to 15 years.

This species is Critically Endangered because its population has rapidly decreased over the last 45 years.

