

## 8<sup>TH</sup> REPORT OF THE ARCBC-CO-FUNDED PHILIPPINE ENDEMIC SPECIES CONSERVATION PROJECT OF THE FRANKFURT ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY

# New species discovered in Panay, Philippines

■ By Rexie Jane Parreño

Exciting discoveries in the Northwest Panay peninsula of the Philippines include the extremely rare **Panay Monitor Lizard** (*Varanus mabitang*), named after its local name “Mabitang”. Dr. Eberhard Curio, head of the Philippine Endemic Species Conservation Project (PESCP), reported on the discovery of the species. He is a professor of the Ruhr University of Germany and a visiting chair under the EU Biodiversity Chair Programme of the ASEAN Regional Centre for Biodiversity Conservation (ARCBC), which co-funds the PESCP and its daughter NGO (BioCon).

The project’s Eighth Report accounted for the finds of the animal species in Panay. Dr. Curio said that this new species “was something else than the region’s common Water Monitor (*V. salvator nuchalis*).” As confirmed by the scale count, which went beyond the range of that of the Philippine Monitor lizard (*V. olivaceus*), and the shape of its tail, the Northwest Panay-restricted herp is a new species in its own right. He added that the Panay Monitor was found to be entirely herbivorous, feeding primarily on the Screw Palm (*Pandanus* sp.) fruits, while the Philippine Monitor feeds on mixed plants and also shelled snails.

Dr. Curio and his team believe that the difference in their diet may not be accidental. Considering that

lowland forests where monitor lizards mainly live are becoming as rare as these species, Dr. Curio recommends “future efforts must be directed at preserving these priceless forest patches; they may be home to many more Panay endemics.”

Some rare louse flies were also discovered. Ten louse fly species - nine Nycteribiid and one Streblid - were collected from their hosts, composed of eight fruit bat species belonging to the order *Megachiroptera*. Of the nine Nycteribiids, eight are new to the island while the Streblid collected was the first for the area. The parasite species collected included a highly polyxenous bird fly (*Ornithotoxona plicata*) that is known to occur on different host-species, previously known from hosts only in Luzon and Palawan.

The researchers likewise discovered two frog species, and a third one that is at least a new distributional record for Panay. A new species of snake (*Lycodon fausti*) was also found, bringing to 11 the number of *Lycodon* species identified in the country. *Lycodon fausti*, the first endemic species of its genus for the West Visayas, has recently been technically described in full. Another snake, with blue and yellow colouration, was also found near the station but has yet to be identified.

The Eighth Report of the PESCP further mentions new distributional

records of some small mammals from Panay. *Crocidura* cf. *palawanensis*, a medium-sized mouse-grey shrew, was accidentally caught in the primary forest near the station at Sibaliw. The Panay shrew has been provisionally assigned to *C. palawanensis* because of its very narrow interorbit. The researchers describe it as having a tail shorter than its head and body length. Long bristle hairs cover about half of its tail, and its fore and hind feet are moderately pigmented; its hind feet also have prominent plantar granulae.

According to Dr. Curio, the entire Philippine complex of *Crocidura* is not yet sufficiently known, and detailed cranial descriptions still have to be elaborated. Thus, he said, a definitive taxonomic assignment of this interesting shrew from Panay has to be postponed.

Likewise, the **House Mouse** (*Mus musculus castaneus*), which was collected accidentally in Bulanao, represents a new distributional record for Panay. The species is found in other parts of the Philippines such as Bohol, Leyte, Luzon, Maripipi, Negros and Mindanao. Dr. Curio confirmed that this species is the dark-bellied indoor form of *Mus musculus*, which is common in Southeast Asia. ■

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