



Identifying priority areas for seabird conservation in the Philippines 2021 Small Grant Fund for Working Group and Task Force Final Report

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SUMMARY

As an archipelagic country and one that lies within the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, it is expected to document and report sightings of pelagic seabirds from the Philippines. However, seabird research and conservation in the Philippines remain depauperate despite the importance of this group of birds. There are also limited and scattered efforts to survey and conserve seabirds, except for Tubbatana Reefs Natural Park. The Seabird Project in the Philippines aims to increase the knowledge and awareness of seabirds and contribute to their conservation and management.

Entitled “Identifying Priority Areas for Seabird Conservation in the Philippines”, the project sought to address three specific objectives: 1) share current knowledge and initiatives by researchers, conservationists, and bird watchers and identify priority areas for research that will contribute to a national action plan for seabirds in the Philippines; 2) increase capacities of local field staff and volunteers in recording the presence of seabirds in their own regions; and 3) develop CEPA knowledge products to increase the awareness among field staff, volunteers, birding enthusiasts, and fisherfolk communities on the seabirds in the Philippines.

The project delivered key outputs that contribute to the overall goal of the project:

- 1.) The National Seabird Forum and Action Planning Workshop were held in October 2022, participated by over 100 participants representing the government, Civil Society Organizations (NGOs and academe), birdwatching and bird photography enthusiasts, and bird tour companies.
- 2.) The Seabird Research and Conservation Strategy for the Philippines (2022-2016) was developed and formally endorsed to the Biodiversity Management Bureau for policy development and budget inclusion.
- 3.) The 1st National Seabird Identification and Monitoring Training and Workshop was organized and held in July 202 through a hybrid event in Quezon City and online via Zoom.
- 4.) The seabird habitats and threats assessment form, and a seabird census form, patterned after the Asian Waterbird Census forms, were developed. These forms were developed for use by field workers and volunteers initiating seabird surveys and monitoring in their region.
- 5.) CEPA activities were designed through the project:
 - a. Seabirds in the Philippines. A poster of the seabirds in the Philippines.
 - b. A Checklist to the Seabirds in the Philippines. A pocket guide to the recorded pelagic seabirds in the Philippines.
 - c. An Introduction to the Seabirds in the Philippines, a booklet to introduce seabirds to a wider audience.
- 6.) Dissemination of the results of the seabird project through:
 - a. Scientific oral presentation during the 29th Annual Philippine Biodiversity Symposium
 - b. Two (2) blog articles contributed to the EAAFP website.

This project is a significant first step towards establishing a roadmap for the research and conservation of seabirds in the Philippines. Moving forward, future activities will aim to contribute to fulfilling the seabird action plan. Further, the project produced new knowledge materials to aid in the awareness raising, research, and conservation of these birds and their habitats in the Philippines.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

GOAL: This project aims to increase the knowledge and awareness of conservation managers, bird watchers, and stakeholders on the status of seabirds in the Philippines.

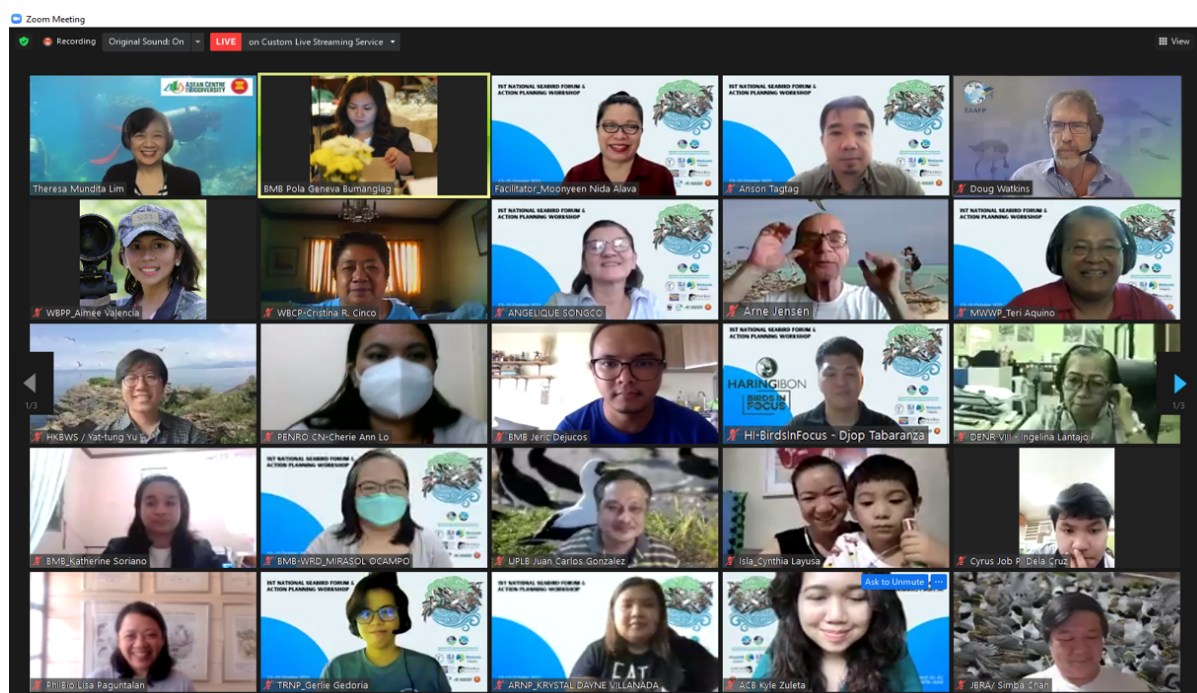
OBJECTIVE 1: Share current knowledge and initiatives by researchers, conservationists, and bird watchers and identify priority areas for research that will contribute to a national action plan for seabirds in the Philippines.

1.1: National Seabird Forum and Action Planning Workshop

The 1st National Seabird Forum and Action Planning Workshop were held on 13-15 October 2021 via the online platform, Zoom. The event was participated by regional and national Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) offices, birdwatching and bird photography community, universities, conservation organizations, and bird tour companies.

Day 1 of the forum was an opportunity to share knowledge and information on past and current efforts to survey and conserve seabirds and identify the local threats to seabirds and their habitats in the Philippines. Days 2 and 3 focused on determining the gaps and challenges for seabird management and developing the road map for their research and conservation in the next five years.

The workshop was co-organized by Isla Biodiversity Conservation and our partners, Biodiversity Management Bureau, Tubbataha Management Office, Marine Wildlife Watch of the Philippines, Wetlands International – Philippines, PhilBio, and University of the Philippines Los Baños. The program of the forum and action planning workshops is provided in Attachment A.



Some of the participants of the 1st National Seabird Forum and Action Planning Workshop held via Zoom.

1.2: National Seabird Research and Conservation Strategy Plan (2022-2026)

The results of the 1st National Seabird Forum and Action Planning Workshop were used in crafting the seabird strategy plan for 2022 through 2026. The strategy and targets of the workshop were validated by the Seabird Forum Core Group through an online meeting on 16 February 2022 held via Google Meet. The result is the first framework to guide the seabird research and conservation initiatives in the country.



Members of the Seabird Forum Core Group during the validation meeting held via Google Meet.

The Seabird Research and Conservation Strategy for the Philippines highlights 5 core thematic areas, which shall be the focus of activities in the next 5 years:

- Research and Monitoring
- Policy Development
- Management and Enforcement
- Communications, Education, and Public Awareness (CEPA)
- Capacity Building

The document was jointly endorsed by Isla Biodiversity Conservation, Inc. and the Tubbataha Management Office to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) - Biodiversity Management Bureau in October 2022. A copy of the strategic plan is provided as Attachment B.

Outcome:

- A Seabird Action Plan Core Group and a network of seabird conservation advocates and conservation were organized through the workshop. This group is recommended to serve as the seabird Technical Working Group in the Philippines.
- The first seabird strategy plan for the Philippines is produced and endorsed to the Biodiversity Management Bureau (BMB). Once approved and adopted by the DENR, this will provide a strong policy and mandate for BMB and the DENR Regional Offices to include seabird monitoring and conservation activities in their yearly budget and activities.



SEABIRD RESEARCH AND CONSERVATION STRATEGY FOR THE PHILIPPINES (2022–2026)



The Seabird Research and Conservation Strategy for the Philippines.

OBJECTIVE 2: Increase the capacities of local field staff and volunteers in recording the presence of seabirds in their own regions.

2.1: 1st National Seabird Identification and Monitoring Training and Workshop

Isla Biodiversity Conservation and the Biodiversity Management Bureau co-organized the 1st National Seabird Training Workshop at a hybrid event in Quezon City and online via Zoom on 20-22 July 2022. Over 80 participants representing national and regional DENR offices, marine protected areas (MPAs), NGOs, and universities from across the Philippines participated in both venues.

Due to COVID-19 health and travel restrictions and protocols, the training focused on classroom-based lectures on seabird identification, the different survey methodologies employed in seabird surveys, and presentations of case studies about site management and community outreach and education. The second part of the event is the workshop to identify potential sites for seabird assessments and surveys. At the end of the workshop, participants produced a list of sites for surveys in the next 1-2 years and within 3-5 years. We also identified the budgetary and technical needs of field workers, such as procuring equipment for communities and local offices, developing field guides, and monitoring manuals, designing capacity-building activities, and tapping partners, experts, and external funding sources.

Before the end of the workshop, Isla turned over field equipment to the Biodiversity Management Bureau, which may be used by the Bureau in future seabird monitoring surveys and capacity-building activities. The program of activities, list of priority sites for seabirds, and the sample forms for seabird census and habitat assessment are in Attachment C.

Outcome:

- Developed the seabird habitats and threats assessment form, and a seabird census form - patterned after the Asian Waterbird Census forms. These forms may be used by field workers and volunteers initiating seabird surveys and monitoring.
- The potential sites for seabird monitoring and assessments throughout the Philippines were identified and prioritized.



On-site participants of the 1st National Seabird Identification and Monitoring Training in Quezon City.

OBJECTIVE 3: Develop CEPA knowledge products to increase awareness among field staff, volunteers, birding enthusiasts, and fisherfolk communities on the seabirds in the Philippines.

3.1: CEPA knowledge products developed and produced.

The project developed awareness and knowledge products to aid different stakeholders.

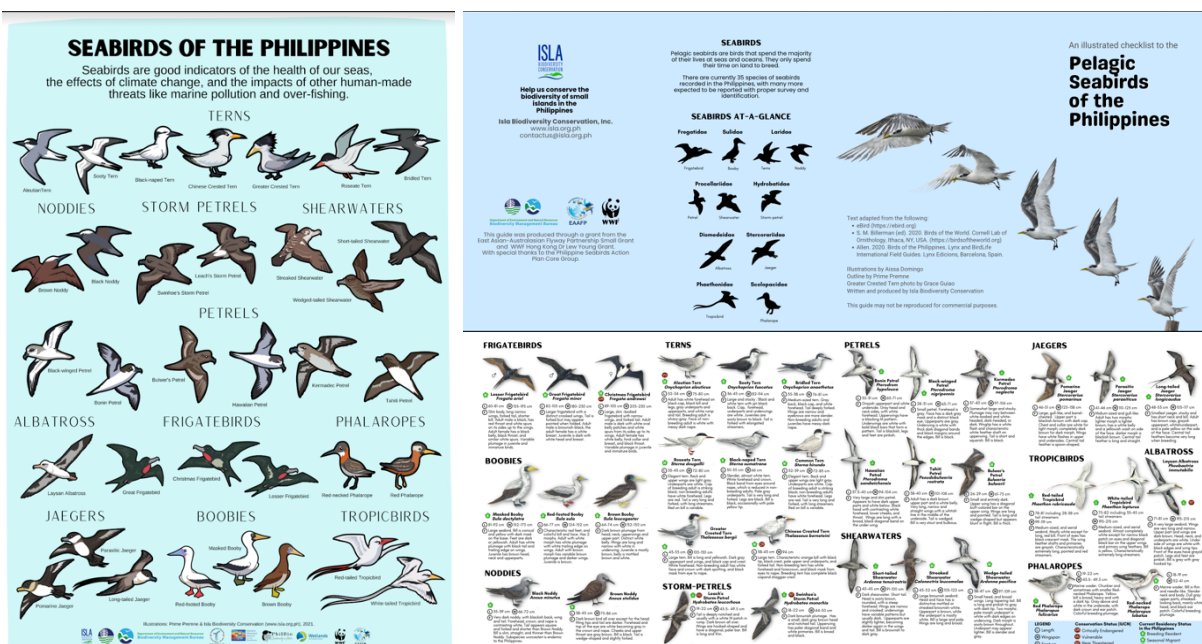
- Seabirds in the Philippines. A poster of the seabirds in the Philippines (Attachment D)
- An Illustrated Checklist to the Pelagic Seabirds in the Philippines. A pocket guide to the recorded pelagic seabirds in the Philippines (Attachment E).
- An Introduction to the Seabirds in the Philippines, a book that hopes to introduce seabirds to a wider audience, with the goal of increasing appreciation of the diversity of seabirds occurring in the Philippines (Attachment F).

3.2: Dissemination activities

- The summaries of the workshops conducted under the project were posted on the EAAFP website:
 - The 1st National Forum and Action Planning Workshop for Seabirds in the Philippines, 27 October 2021 <https://www.eaaflyway.net/1st-national-seabird-forum-in-philippines/>
 - The Philippines conducts its 1st National Training on Seabird Identification and Monitoring, 26 July 2022 https://www.eaaflyway.net/2022philippines_1st_seabird-training-workshop/
- The process and results of the 1st National Seabird Forum and Action Planning Workshop were presented as a scientific oral presentation during the 29th Annual Philippine Biodiversity Symposium organized by the Biodiversity Conservation Society of the Philippines from 5-9 December 2021 via Zoom Events. The Symposium Book of Abstracts is found [here](#).

A compilation of the scientific abstract and the two write-ups are presented in Attachment G and a copy of the slide presentation delivered at the 29th Annual Philippine Biodiversity Symposium is in Attachment H.

Outcome: we produced new knowledge products on seabirds in the Philippines. These contribute to a) raising awareness and facilitating knowledge-sharing about the seabirds in the country; b) supplementing the capacities of field workers and volunteers in identifying seabirds as a follow-through to the training workshop; and c) helping fill the needs and gaps of field managers as identified in the seabird strategy plan.



CEPA and knowledge materials for seabirds.

LIST OF ATTACHMENTS AND ANNEX

ATTACHMENT

- A National Seabird Forum and Action Planning Workshop Proceedings
- B Seabird Research and Conservation Strategy for the Philippines (2022-2026)
- C 1st National Seabird Training Workshop Program, Site Summaries, and Census Forms
- D Seabirds of the Philippines Poster
- E Illustrated Checklist to the Pelagic Seabirds of the Philippines
- F An Introduction to the Pelagic Seabirds of the Philippines Book
- G Compilation of abstract and write-ups
- H Contributed scientific presentation at the 29th Annual Philippine Biodiversity Symposium

ANNEX

- Financial Report