

## The Philippine Bird Festival: A Showcase of Vibrant CSO-Government Collaboration<sup>1</sup>



The 5th Philippine Bird Festival, the country's largest celebration of avifaunal diversity and bird lore awareness, is set to take off on October 9 in Balanga City in Bataan. Balanga holds the Philippine record for hosting the largest concentration of wintering shorebirds from the Asian mainland and Japan.

Bird watchers, conservationists and nature enthusiasts from here and abroad are expected to flock to the Bataan Provincial Capitol grounds in Balanga City on October 9 and 10 for the 5th annual Philippine Bird Festival, the country's largest celebration of avifaunal diversity and bird lore awareness.

The Philippine Bird Festival will mark the arrival from the Asian mainland and Japan of wintering shorebirds with the official dedication of the Balanga Nature and Wetland Park, the first protected wetland park in the whole Manila Bay area.

Themed *Ibong Dayo, Kaibigan Tayo!* (The Migrant Birds: Our Friends), this year's bird festival aims to drum public support for the conservation and awareness of the Balanga wetlands, where more than 15,000 individual birds were on record during the Asian Waterbird Census in January.

The wetlands of Puerto Rivas in Balanga City attract one of the largest concentration of migrant shorebirds and waterfowl anywhere in the Philippines, according to the Wild Bird Club of the Philippines (WBCP), the country's leading bird watching society and organizer of the Philippine Bird Festival.



Mayor Joet Garcia with Mike Lu at the bird festival launching.

<sup>1</sup> This article (with original title, *5th Philippine Bird Festival – City of Balanga*) is shared by the Wild Bird Club of the Philippines through its President, Mr. Mike Lu. Mike's presentation mostly focused on this successful event, which highlights the importance of strong collaboration between government, CSOs, and the private sector in launching and implementing conservation and nature-positive campaigns.

“The Balanga wetlands consistently land in the country’s top 5 wetlands with the most number of wintering water birds, which included Candaba Marsh in Pampanga and Olango Island in Cebu,” said WBCP president Michael Lu, who participated in the annual survey. These three sites are on the Asian flyway, but the Balanga wetlands located across the Bay from Metro Manila continues to be a surprise. “We hope to bring attention to the need to conserve the entire coastline and waters of Manila Bay,” he said.

The Balanga wetlands are being promoted as a bird watching destination by the Adventure Philippines campaign of the Department of Tourism and the Recreational Outdoor Exchange, according to Lu.

Bird Festival Committee chair Alice Villa-Real said the annual event hopes to raise the bar of awareness about the bird life of the islands, promote public interest in conservation and encourage the creation of more public green spaces.

Villa-Real said there are more than 600 species of birds in the Philippines, no fewer than 200 are found only in the archipelago. She also said places like the mudflats and remaining mangroves of the Manila Bay coastline provide a temporary home for migrant birds like the rare Chinese Egret, Grey Heron (talabong), Whiskered Terns (kanaway), sandpipers and plovers (tarinting).



Bataan National High School street dancers won first place at the birdfest launch

This year’s Bird Festival will open with the dedication ceremony at the Balanga Nature and Wetland Park in Tortugas, followed by street dancing by local troupes along the route to the new Plaza Mayor de Balanga. The exhibit of bird photos, lectures and film screenings at the People’s Center in the capitol grounds will be open to the public free of charge. Organizers said an activity center featuring bird-themed games, arts and crafts, and face painting will be on tap for the young and the young at heart.

The Provincial Government is simultaneously staging a trade fair on the Capitol grounds that will feature the best products from 12 towns in Bataan.

The Philippine Bird Festival was launched by local bird watching hobbyists in 2005 and has since brought the message of birdlife awareness and conservation to Cebu City and Puerto Princesa in Palawan, two of the country’s important bird areas.

Similar events take place throughout the world each year, attracting large numbers of bird watchers, scientists and nature enthusiasts. In Asia, some of the well-known events are the annual Taipei International Birdwatching Fair in Taiwan and Malaysia’s Raptor Watch Week.

This year’s Philippine Bird Festival is sponsored by the City of Balanga and the Province of Bataan, Department of Tourism, Team Energy Foundation, Genesis Transport, Primer Group, Recreational Outdoor Exchange (ROX), & Columbia Outdoor Wear.

Taiwan's Wild Bird Society of Taipei, Kaoshiung Wild Bird Society and Chinese Wild Bird Federation, the Bird Conservation Society of Thailand, Hong Kong Birdwatching Society, the Nature Society of Singapore and the Malaysia Nature Society have announced their participation in this year's festival.

Local conservation organizations Philippine Eagle Foundation of Davao, the Katala Foundation of Palawan, World Wide Fund for Nature-Philippines, Isla Biodiversity Conservation Foundation, the Polillo Island Biodiversity Conservation Foundation, Pederasyon sa Nagkahiusang mga Mag-uuma nga Nanalipud ug Napisig-uli sa Kinaiyahan Inc. of Dumaguete, Birdwatch Palawan, Philippine Biodiversity Conservation Foundation, and Cebu Biodiversity Conservation Foundation, the Municipality of Candaba in Pampanga, the City of Bislig in Surigao del Sur and Bataan Artists Society also made known their support for the Balanga event.

**Courtesy of the Wild Bird Club of the Philippines**

<https://birdwatch.ph/2009/10/12/5th-philippine-bird-festival-city-of-balanga/>



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