

18 AUG 2013

DATE :

DAY :

Sunday

DENR

IN THE NEWS

Strategic Communication and Initiative Service



Sa San Juan River rehab

ABOITIZ GROUP, DENR SANIB-PUWERSA

MULING makikipagtulungan ang kompanyang Aboitiz Group sa Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) upang maisayos ang rehabilitasyon ng San Juan River, isa sa pangunahing ilog na dumadaloy sa Pasig River.

Ito ay makaraang pagtibayin ang isang memorandum of agreement sa pagitan ni DENR Secretary

Roy Cimatu, Aboitiz Equity Ventures Inc. (AEVI) at ng Aboitiz Foundation Inc. (AFI) para sa pagpapatupad ng San Juan River Rehabilitation Plan.

Layon ng naturang hakbang na mapababa ang polusyon ng tubig na dumadaloy sa San Juan River, na isa sa pinaka-polluted na ilog na dumidiretso sa Manila Bay, sa pamamagitan ng dredging at clean up activities.

"Today, we take a solid and resolute step towards winning the Battle for Manila Bay with the signing of a (MOA) among the DENR, Aboitiz Equity Ventures and Aboitiz Foundation for the sustainable clean up and rehabilitation of San Juan River," pahayag ni Cimatu sa ginanap na MOA signing sa DENR central office, Quezon City.

Matatandaang ang Aboitiz ay isa sa mga kom-

panyang naging kapartner ng DENR sa isinagawang rehabilitasyon sa Boracay Island.

"Let us applaud the DENR-Aboitiz Group partnership and hold it aloft as a model for more partnerships to follow," wika ni Cimatu.

Nabatid na ang 11-kilometer San Juan River rehabilitation ay tatagal ng tatlong taon at isasagawa sa tulong ng AFL, isang social development arm ng Aboitiz Group.

BENEDICT ABAYGAR, JR.



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5,000 tree seedlings planted at watershed of new Ecija dam

By Steve Gosuico

GENERAL TINIO, Nueva Ecija – Some 5,000 narra and mahogany seedlings were planted on Friday at the watershed area of the P787-million Upper Tabuatin Irrigation Project (UTIP) in the vicinity of the Sierra Madre mountain range during the 8th leg of the launching of the “Three Million Trees in Five Years, Adopt A Mountain” program by the municipal government.

Spearheaded by Mayor Isidro Pajarillaga, the massive tree-planting activity was held in partnership with the National Irrigation Administration-Upper Pampanga River Integrated Irrigation Systems, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, other government agencies, the military, the private sector, and other stakeholders.

Pajarillaga said the united front to re-forest the part of the town's Sierra Madre mountain range has already succeeded in planting over 40,000 seedlings during the first half of the program.

During last Friday's activity, at least 5,000 seedlings were planted by some 800 participants in the tree-planting event.

Engineer Rosalinda Bote, NIA-UPRIIS department manager, said the event's highlight was the forging of a memorandum of agreement to plant three million trees within five years in line with the government's Sierra Madre Greening program and Mayor Pajarillaga's advocacy and plan to convert the area into “Centennial Sanctuary Part 2,” similar to a reforestation project which he started in Bgy. Rio Chico in 2004 when he first won as mayor.

Aside from Mayor Pajarillaga, among the signatories to the MoA were the respective heads and representatives of the NIA-UPRIIS, the DENR, the Rotary Clubs of Manila and Makati, and the 7th Infantry Division.

Engineer Jose Ariel Domingo, UPRIIS Division 3 manager, said it was the 8th tree-planting activity at the watershed area of the UTIP.

He said it was actually part of the agency's plan to green the Philippines the NIA way, in accordance with the directives of NIA administrator Ricardo Visaya, who was represented by retired general Ralph Villanueva, a former 7thID commander, now-assigned as NIA management and security consultant for Region 3, UPRIIS and the Balog-Balog project.

DENR lifts Station 1 temporary closure

By Eimer N. Manuel

Following the temporary closure of some parts of the Boracay shoreline after some foreigners allegedly let their children defecate on parts of the beach, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) said that the affected areas are now open.

The closure was triggered by a viral video of a foreigner allowing her child to foul up Boracay waters with human waste, which led authorities to cordon-off a 100-meter wide section of the beach in Station 1 on Wednesday.

DENR Secretary Roy Cimatu announced that the area reopened on 4 p.m. Thursday after fecal coliform test results revealed that the waters there were "almost perfect," said Cimatu, adding that the "isolated" defecation incident serves as a "wake-up call" for vacationers.

Undersecretary Benny Antiporda, on the other hand, revealed that the DENR will ask the Boracay Inter-Agency Task Force to consider putting up public toilets near the beach as private establishments might not allow non-paying customers to use their facilities.

In line with the incident, Boracay officials on Thursday said they would step up their information campaign on the "do's and don'ts" for tourists visiting the island in the wake of the defecation incident.

"This move should send a strong message to local and foreign tourists to uphold the government's advocacy for sustainable tourism and to observe the rules and regulations being implemented while enjoying the island paradise," said Natividad Bernardino, director of the Boracay Inter-Agency Rehabilitation Management Group (BIARMG) in an earlier statement.

Bernardino noted that the BIARMG is considering new measures for tourists to comply with rules and regulations in Boracay, particularly the anti-littering ordinance that prohibits littering, urinating, defecating, spitting and dumping trash in public places.

"We are planning to give pamphlets through the airline on the do's and don'ts on the island especially on the proper way to throw garbage and the policy against defecation at the Boracay beach," said Bernardino.

The official added that they are also mulling the inclusion of other foreign languages for signages against littering, smoking and carrying glass bottles.

"Majority of the foreign visitors are from China and South Korea," Bernardino noted.

"Considering the great proportion of Chinese and Korean visitors relative to the total number of Boracay's visitors, we should now perhaps include the Chinese and Korean languages in the signage, which presently carry warnings only in English."



PARTIAL closure now lifted in Boracay's Station 1.



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Editorial **EDITORIAL** *Editorial*

Dagdag na toilet at bantay sa Bora, iwas-pambababoy sa isla

DAGDAG na public toilet, beach guards at Malay Auxiliary Police ang ilan sa mga nakikitang solusyon upang hindi na maulit ang 'beachfront pooping incident' sa Isla ng Boracay.

Matatandaang, nag-viral ang video kung saan namataan ang isa umanong Chinese na babae na hinuhugasan sa baybayin ang anak nito na dumumi, habang ang isa pa ay nakitang ibinabaon sa buhangin ang diaper.

Kaugnay nito, dalawang araw na ipinasara ng Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) ang bahagi ng Station 1 upang mahanap ang 'kontrobersiyal na diaper'.

At ngayon nga ay puwede na ulit paliguan ang bahagi ng dagat matapos lumabas sa resulta ng coliform bacteria level test sa water samples na nasa safe level ito.

Ayon sa pamunuan ng Malay, Aklan, minsan talaga, "ang tawag ng kalikasan" ay hindi maiwasan. Kasabay nito ang paglililaw na may dalawang public toilets malapit sa beachfront sa Stations 2 at 3, subalit ipinagiba umano sa pagpasok ng Boracay Inter-Agency Task Force.

Sana nga ay hindi na maulit ang insidenteng ito o anumang uri ng kababuyan.

Alalahanin natin na minsan nang inabuso ang Boracay Island at wala tayong nagawa kundi ang magsisi at maghintay na maisalba ito.



EL NIÑO TASK FORCE MULING BUBUHAYIN

MULING bubuhayin ni Pangulong Rodrigo Roa Duterte ang El Niño Task Force upang matugunan ang epekto ng tagtuyot sa bansa.

Batay sa nilagdaan ni Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea na Memorandum Order No. 38, nakasaad dito na muling bubuhayin ang task force na nabuo noong taong 2001 sa ilalim ni dating Pangulong Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

Nakasaad din ang inilabas na climate models ng DOST-PAGASA na ang El Niño ay mararanasan mula noong Hunyo hanggang ngayong buwan ng Agosto.

Kaya nga, kailangan umano ng short at long-term solutions para matiyak ang

katugunan sa epekto nito.

Sa kabilang dako, kasama sa pinatitiyak ang pagkakaroon ng food, water at energy security, safeguard livelihood, at mas maayos na disaster and climate resilience ng bansa.

Sinasabing si Economic Secretary Ernesto Pernia ang

mamumuno sa task force.

Habang ang agriculture secretary ang magiging pinuno ng food security, ang environment secretary sa water security, energy secretary para sa power security, health secretary sa health at interior secretary sa safety concerns.

Ang mga miyembro ng task force ay ang science and technology secretary, defense secretary, social welfare secretary, labor secretary, trade secretary, communications secretary, chairperson ng National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council, Technical Education and

Skills Development Authority director-general, Office of the Civil Defense administrator, National Food Authority administrator, National Irrigation Authority administrator at ang Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration chief.

KRIS JOSE



El Niño simula ngayong buwan

MULING binuhay ng Palasyo ang El Niño Task Force upang mapaghandaan ang nakaambang tagtuyot sa bansa.

“Recent monitoring and analyses of the Department of Science and Technology-Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration indicate that the warm sea surface temperature

which started in November of last year in the center and eastern equatorial Pacific has fully developed into the El Niño phenomenon,” ani Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea.

Idinagdag niya na base sa pagtaya ng Pagasa, 75 porsiyento na posibleng tumama ang El Niño sa bansa ngayong buwan.

“The recurrence of the El Niño phenomenon calls for the implementation of both short and long-term solutions to ensure food, water and energy security, safeguard livelihood and improve the country’s disaster and climate resilience,” ayon kay Medialdea.

Pangungunahan ni National Economic Development Authority director general Ernesto Pernia ang task force.

— *Bella Cariaso*



The water towers of Asia

COMMENTARY

RODEL D. LASCO

Kathmandu, Nepal—As our plane made its final approach to Kathmandu international airport, I was awed by the Himalayan mountain ranges that filled the windows on both sides of the plane. It was a reminder that the country is host to eight of the 10 tallest mountain peaks of the world, including Mount Everest, of course.

Nepal conjures images of mountain tranquility and peace, and indeed it is such a place. Perhaps even more importantly, the Himalayas are also called the water towers of Asia. Melting ice from these mountains provides life-giving water to close to two billion people, which is most of continental Asia.

But as the meeting of IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) scientists began on July 15, that image was shattered by the looming crisis of climate change. What is happening to the mountains of Nepal will affect more than their country. As mountain glaciers shrink because of warming temperatures, the water supply of two billion people is at tremendous risk. Water scarcity is already straining relationships between South Asian nations. As the planet warms, conflicts over water resources may escalate to the point of actual shooting wars. Loss of Himalayan ice and snow will also have cascading effects on global sea-level rise, resulting in submerged

coastlines on the megadeltas of Asia, hundreds of millions of environmental migrants and loss of agricultural lands due to rising coastal and riverine salinity levels.

In his speech to open the IPCC meeting, Nepal Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli highlighted the risks his country is facing because of a warming planet. I was struck by the sincerity of his tone as he narrated the ways in which his country was being battered as the planet's climate gyrates toward an uncertain future.

When we arrived, the monsoon rains had just started falling, which was good news for farmers because the rains were a couple of weeks late. In fact, Nepali scientists have been observing more erratic weather patterns, as exhibited by the late onset of monsoon rains. In addition, disasters caused by flooding are becoming more common. Scores of people recently died in Nepal because of floods and landslides triggered by the monsoon rains.

So what of it to us? Indirectly, the Himalayas and Tibetan Plateau greatly influence

the global circulation that affects our weather and climate systems. Also, the Mekong River, which is fed by the waters from the Himalayas and which provides irrigation to rice-producing countries from which we import rice, is reportedly at its lowest level in 100 years.

The struggles of Nepal and surrounding nations remind us that we share a common fate with the rest of humanity. The manifestations may differ, but all of us will be affected by the planet's rapidly warming climate.

In addition, addressing climate change cannot be done by one or a few countries acting on their own. The nations of the world must band together to keep greenhouse gas emissions down. At the same time, vulnerable sectors and communities must be capacitated to live and prosper in this heating world.

As I headed toward the airport to fly back to Manila, black clouds were gathering again over Kathmandu, the weather uncertain. A premonition of things to come for our planet?

Dr. Rodol Lasco is an author of several IPCC reports, including the forthcoming sixth assessment report. He is the executive director of The OML Center, a foundation devoted to discovering climate change adaptation solutions (<http://www.omlopezcenter.org/>).



THE Las Piñas City Police Station participated in the clean-up drive spearheaded by the City Environment and Natural Resources Office at Verdant Creek, Pamplona 3.



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CEBU City government employees join volunteers in the cleanup of the Guadalupe River in Cebu City. (Juan Carlo de Vela)



100-anyos na pawikan nalambat

Isang Green Sea Turtle na nalambat sa isang baklad ang pinalad pang mabuhay matapos masagip ng Bantay Dagat ng Silay City, Negros Occidental sa gitna ng karagatang sakop ng Negros Occidental.

Nabatid na ang pawikan ay tinatayang nasa isang daang taon na at may timbang na 210 kilo.

Ayon kay Ryan Geguera, co-ordinator ng Bantay Dagat, bago na-trap sa baklad ang nasabing pawikan ay posibleng naghahanap ito ng makakain kaya napadpad ito at sumabit sa baklad.

Ang mga Green Sea Turtle ay karaniwang nakikita sa Apo Islands sa Negros Occidental ngunit pinangangambahang malapit nang maubos ang kanilang lahi.
(Vick Aquino)



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Phl, US troops install artificial habitat reefs

By JAIME LAUDE

Filipino and American servicemen have successfully installed 30 artificial reefs that will serve as fish sanctuaries and breeding grounds in the waters of Calatagan in Batangas, the Philippine Air Force (PAF) reported yesterday.

The project, dubbed Operation Pamamalakaya, was launched by the PAF and its US counterpart in partnership with non-government organization DV Boer Farm, Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, Community Environmental and Natural Resources Office and the municipal government of Calatagan.

"These reefs will serve as shelter, food sources and breeding site of marine wildlife. Corals will eventually cover the sunken structure, thereby revitalizing marine life and improving fishing livelihood in the coastal communities of Batangas," said Lt. Col. Engelberto Nioda Jr., chief of PAF's

730th Combat Group and 710th Special Operations Wing.

Nioda said the activity involved installation of jackstone-type, artificial habitat reefs made of construction materials in the waters off Barangay Hukay in Calatagan.

The country's coastal waters are suffering from environmental degradation due largely to illegal fishing and garbage dumping by residents.

Nioda described the artificial reef-planting as a life-saving human endeavor and "a small contribution to the underwater ecosystem, but a great catalyst to the socio-economic development of the coastal communities."

"The project was a fantastic opportunity for us to partner with our friends in the Philippine Air Force and help preserve the Philippine environment for future generations," said Maj. Zach Hart, leader of the US team of servicemen and divers who took part in the reef-planting activity.



US, PH divers install artificial habitat reefs in Calatagan, Batangas

UNITED States military divers and their Philippine partners on Thursday installed artificial habitat reefs in Bgy. Hukay, Calatagan, Batangas.

The U.S. and Philippine service members, local government workers, and non-governmental organizations partnered to install the artificial reefs in an effort to sustain marine life and provide livelihood of fishermen in the coastal communities of Batangas.

Dubbed "Operation Pamamalakaya," the project was a collaboration between the Philippine Air Force, DV Boer Farm, Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, Community Environment and Natural Resources Office, and the municipality of Calatagan, local government and residents.

The U.S. military participated with six divers and five support crew members.

Installed were a total

of 30 jackstone-type artificial habitat reefs made from simple construction materials.

The reefs will serve as shelter, food sources, and breeding areas for wildlife.

Coral will eventually cover the sunken structure, revitalizing marine life and improving fishing livelihoods in the coastal communities of Batangas.

"Artificial reef planting is a lifesaving human endeavor. A small contribu-

tion to the underwater ecosystem but a great catalyst to the socio-economic development of the coastal communities," said Lt. Col. Engelberto Nioda Jr., group commander, 730th Combat Group, 710th Special Operations Wing, Philippine Air Force.

"This project was a fantastic opportunity for us to partner with our friends in the PAF and help preserve the Philippine environment for future generations," said Maj. Zach Hart, a participating diver.

Cristina Lee-Pisco



EDITORIAL

A space agency—why not?

Science geeks rejoice. Republic Act No. 11363 or the Philippine Space Act, which lays the groundwork for the country's space technology roadmap in the next decade through the creation of the Philippine Space Agency (PhilSA)—the country's version of Nasa—was signed by President Duterte earlier this month. This makes the Philippines the sixth country in Southeast Asia to have its own space agency after Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

PhilSA, with an initial funding of P10 billion spread over five years, will support research and development programs aimed at improving the lives of Filipinos as well as enhancing the country's national security. More importantly, it will organize under one national agency all space-related activities focusing on six developmental areas: national security and development; hazard management and climate studies; space research and development; space industry capacity-building; space education and awareness; and international cooperation.

Few are aware that space science is not new to the Philippines. In the mid-1960s, the government built a ground satellite station in Rizal and entered into a joint venture to put up the Philippine Communications Satellite (Philcomsat). Philcomsat had an exclusive franchise for satellite communication in Southeast Asia, South Korea and Japan, and provided the equipment that allowed people in Asia to watch the Apollo 11 launch on July 16, 1969.

Over the past decades, the country has moved forward—though very slowly—in space technology, with the help of other countries. It reached a major breakthrough when in April 2016, Diwata-1, the first microsatellite owned by the government and developed by Filipino engineers, was launched into orbit. As of February 2019, Diwata-1 has captured more than 36,000 images, including that of Manila Bay. The data using landsat (land satellite) technology helped scientists analyze the level of turbidity in the Bay and identify the sources of pollution, months before the government launched a massive cleanup. Two other satellites have since been launched after Diwata-1: Maya-1 in June 2018 and Diwata-2 in October 2018.

For many, space technology sounds like a lofty—not to mention costly—idea for a poor country like the Philippines. "When you talk about Philippine Space program, normally, the first thing that comes to mind is sending people to space," said Dr. Rogel Mari Sese, an astrophysicist and one of PhilSA's main proponents, in a TV interview. "What we are more concerned about is bringing the benefits of space technologies and applications to the Philippines. This can come in various forms."

These applications include transmitting signals for TV, mobile phones and broadband, among others. The global positioning system or GPS, which is a main function in smartphones, rely on transmissions from satellites. And through remote sensing, space science also has the capability to capture satellite images that help scientists monitor environmental conditions, like an approaching storm or the impact of heat waves. This information is important for farmers and fishermen, for example, because it helps them decide when to plant or harvest, or when to go out to sea to fish. During disasters, it can identify the most affected areas as well as their accessibility, so help could reach them sooner. In an archipelago like the Philippines, this will also tremendously improve connectivity between islands. Moreover, the technology can monitor areas like the West Philippine Sea, a flashpoint for un-sanctioned activities that have been threatening the country's sovereignty.

Before the development of its own satellites, the country had been dependent on foreign technology, costing it about P3.5 billion annually just to acquire satellite images, space communications capabilities and other space technology applications, said Sese. But if the Philippines were to run its own national space program that will fulfill all these requirements, the cost would be about P2.5 billion.

With its P10-billion initial funding and more than 1,000 space science experts "ready, willing and able" to join PhilSA, the new space law should improve the country's space technology capabilities and encourage more young people to pursue space science and related courses as a career—especially now that local schools have started offering these courses. The Department of Science and Technology has partnered with the University of the Philippines Diliman to offer aerospace engineering courses this year, while Ateneo de Davao University started a similar program last year.

Welcome to the Philippines' space age.



Tubbataha: 'We must build apartments for some 2,000 birds—we're halfway there'

By **Alya B. Honasan**
@Inq_Lifestyle

One cloudy afternoon last June, I skipped a dive during the extended transition trip from Tubbataha to Batangas of the Discovery Fleet's sleek, comfortable dive boat M/V Discovery Palawan, so Angelique Songco, the indefatigable Protected Area Superintendent of Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park, could entrust me to her veteran Marine Park Ranger Segundo "Seconds" Conales of the Tubbataha Management Office (TMO).

Seconds took the Discovery Fleet's operations head and photographer Yvette Lee, photographer Andrei Voinigescu, and myself for a quick spin by TMO speedboat around the little strip of land known as Bird Islet. It was a rare treat, as no visitors are allowed within a hundred meters of the place to leave the residents in peace.

We got close enough to see the seabirds' new manmade digs—bamboo structures in different forms, with gradations like stairs or shelves, and with several little "units" already occupied. Although the small forest that once existed there was gone, despite the Rangers' replanting efforts, it was heartening to see much life—mothers were herding their chicks along the beach. "We should build apartments for some 2,000 birds," Songco reveals. "We're about halfway there."

More will come up as well on Tubbataha's South Islet, where the construction of a new lighthouse, a Coast Guard facility required for navigation in the area, was recently completed, and will help prevent the island's further erosion.

Essential part

The birds are an essential part of the experience of being in Tubbataha in the Sulu Sea, easily the Philippines' most important marine protected area. If you can tear your eyes away from the deep, hypnotic blue of the water and the marine life underneath, you spot the seabirds—soaring through the impossibly clear sky, skimming the glassy ocean surface, swooping down to join the feast when tuna drive smaller fish upward.

Tubbataha was proclaimed a

marine park and protected area by President Corazon Aquino in 1988, inscribed as a Unesco World Heritage Site in 1993, added to the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance in 1999, and declared an Asean Heritage Park in 2014.

In 2015, it was also declared one of three Flyway Network Sites in the country by the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership, an international network of partners working to conserve migratory seabirds and their habitats.

That's because amid these 97,000-plus hectares of submerged reefs, the two islets, North (also known as Bird Islet) and South, make up an important rookery for migratory birds.

In a world where animals' homes are being destroyed at an alarming rate, Tubbataha has been called the country's "last great rookery"—among the remaining known safe breeding habitats of six species of seabirds in Southeast Asia: the Red-footed Booby (*Sula sula*), the Brown Booby (*Sula leucogaster*), the Great Crested Tern (*Thalasseus bergii*), the Sooty Tern (*Onychoprion fuscatus*), the

Brown Noddy (*Anous stolidus*), and the Black Noddy (*Anous minutus worcesteri*).

This subspecies of Black Noddy, in particular, is significant. Its scientific name reveals that it was one of the birds first spotted in these parts by noted American naturalist Dean Worcester in 1911. Also, it is found only in the Sulu Sea.

Therein lies a problem now facing the people protecting Tubbataha, specifically the TMO: Since 2015, the numbers of birds recorded in the TMO's annual bird count have been going down.

In 2016, there was elation when scientists spotted the

Masked Booby (*Sula dactylatra*) during a bird count May 10-14, 2016, the first sighting in 21 years. This bird was last seen in 1995, and was believed to have become extinct in these parts. One solitary specimen has since made its home there.

Other than that, the numbers are sobering. Among the four species of ground breeders, who lay their eggs on land, only the Great Crested Terns have increased in number. For the two tree breeders, who build nests above ground, the Red-footed Booby count has steadily decreased from 3,492 in 2015 to 1,080 this year. From 8,716 individuals in 2016, only 2,072 Black



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Tubbataha: 'we must build apartments for some 2,000 birds
were half way there

Noddies were counted this year.

Lost vegetation

What happened?

"We've lost a lot of vegetation over the years," reports Songco.

The reason is not that simple, however. What beach forest existed on this approximately 2-ha strip of land has been overfertilized—literally, degraded by the constant excretion of a lot of Red-footed Boobies.

"They have had to leave previous roosts in the Sulu Sea, such as Cagayancillo," Songco says. "If there's a disturbance where they live, they will search for new places. We got an over-

abundance of the species, so in 10 years, the forest was gone."

Here's where it gets more delicate. Songco has had to prioritize her focus; as one consultant told her, "We have to take care of the platinum first, then the gold and silver after."

Platinum in this case are the more endangered Black Noddies, who have no other habitat in the area but Tubbataha. "The Booby will survive elsewhere, but the Noddy won't."

A solution, as approved by the TMO's avifauna management advisor, Manila-based Danish ornithologist and conservation scientist Arne Jensen, has been quite interesting: to build "bird apartments" to shelter the smaller Black Noddies, so they are not displaced, and can nest and lay their eggs in peace without worrying about the bigger birds' sh-t literally falling on their heads.

The lighthouse will certainly benefit the dive boats that come here every Tubbataha season; after all, tourism is the park's main source of revenue. Underwater, the reefs again did not disappoint. In fact, in what is now one of my most memorable scuba-diving experiences, an 8-meter whale shark we spotted at about 30 feet followed our group to the surface for almost half an hour of interaction, swimming lazily around. It was a testament to how the animals felt safe in Songco's turf; nobody here was going to turn this gentle beauty into soup.

Songco says TMO is still experimenting with the optimum design for the bird apartments. The decline in population tells a bigger story than she can directly control, however.

"Unless they have a stable habitat, birds will not return. Bird habitats have to be protected in places beyond Tubbataha. This is indicative of conditions outside the park; what happens affects us, and it's the threats from outside that are difficult to manage."

As the birds skimmed the water at the end of another perfect day, we could only hope that Tubbataha's topside treasures can continue to thrive as well as their counterparts beneath the waves. INQ

Visit www.tubatahareef.org,
www.discoveryfleet.com.

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Tubbataha: We must build apartments for some 2,000 birds -
halfway there

What happened? 'We've lost a lot of vegetation over the years'



Seabirds nest in compartmentalized "apartments" built on the islet. —YVETTE LEE



The Tubbataha Reefs, with the M/Y Discovery Palawan in the foreground, as photographed using a drone. —ANDREI VOINIGESCU



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SAMPLES of toys with high lead and bromine content.

Imported 'ukay-ukay' toys pose health risks to children

IMPORTED toys and other children's products sold in thrift stores or "ukay-ukay" shops ("UK" for short) may be cheap and look sturdy but not necessarily safe for children especially if played without adult supervision.

The environmental and health advocacy group EcoWaste Coalition urged bargain hunters to take safety precautions when buying second hand children's products such as toys, which are sold in "UK" stores sans the required labeling information.

The group warned parents following the examination of 105 assorted children's products they bought for P10 to P180 each from "ukay-ukay" stores in Manila and Quezon cities.

Thony Dizon, Chemical Safety Campaigner of EcoWaste Coalition, said most of the toys sold in "UK" stores were not labeled, which is against Republic Act 10620, or the Toy and Game Safety Labeling Act of 2013.

They found that as many as 78 toys they bought contain small parts that may be separated from the toy. A child may put the detached toy component in the mouth and choke, so a cautionary warning is definitely necessary.

Aside from choking hazard, the group also found some ukay-ukay products laden with chemicals that are dangerous to human health, especially to a child's developing brain and central nervous system.

With the help of a handheld X-Ray Fluorescence (XRF) analytical device, the group detected lead, a cumulative toxicant that can affect mental and physical development, in 13 items, including toy cars, toy figurines, toy xylophone, a mug with a football design and a drinking glass with an image of Peko-chan.

"For example, the yellow, orange, green and bars of a used toy xylophone had lead content measuring 27, 200; 11,900; 9,673; and 506 parts per million (ppm), respectively, exceeding the maximum 90 ppm limit for lead in paint," Dizon said.

The group also found 13 toys, mostly toy cars, with high bromine content ranging from 723 to 4,190 ppm. Eight of these 13 items had bromine exceeding 1,000 ppm.

The bromine found on the black plastic component of these toys, which may come from recycled plastic electronic casings, may indicate the presence of brominated flame retardant chemicals or BFRs.

BFRs such as polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs) are known to interfere with the endocrine or hormone system. Other potential effects include hepatotoxicity (chemical-driven liver damage) and neurotoxicity (damage to the central and/or peripheral nervous system).

PBDEs are among the new persistent organic pollutants or POPs targeted for global elimination under the Stockholm Convention, which includes the Philippines as one of the state parties.

Though the group advocates recycling, Dizon said nobody wanted to buy and allow their children to play recycled and contaminated toys from abroad which would harm their children's well-being.

BHABY SEE