

Profiles



Photos by George Tapan

Mt. Kitanglad Range

NATURAL PARK BUKIDNON, MINDANAO, PHILIPPINES

For anyone wanting to have a glimpse of the endangered Philippine Eagle (*Pithecophaga jefferyi*) in its natural habitat, Mt. Kitanglad Range Natural Park would be the perfect place to go. Mt. Kitanglad is one of the few remaining rainforests in the Philippines, hosting one of the most important diverse species of rare and endemic wildlife such as the Philippine Eagle, which is now known as the country's national bird. The Park's diverse and rich flora and fauna make it one of the last sanctuaries of the country's natural heritage.

The natural park boasts more than a dozen mountain peaks, densely forested slopes, a number of caves, several waterfalls and a hot spring. Five of its peaks have very high elevations: Mt. Dulang-Dulang, the highest at 2,938 m; Mt. Kitanglad, 2,899 m; Mt. Maagnaw, 2,742 m; Mt. Lumuluyaw, 2,612 m; and

Mt. Tuminungan, 2,400 m.

Legend relates that when the great flood submerged the native lands, only the tip of the mountain, which was the size of a *tanglad* plant (lemon grass), remained visible; thus the name Kitanglad.

The Mt. Kitanglad Range Natural Park covers 47,270 hectares (protected area – 31,236 ha; buffer zone – 16,034 ha) in the north central portion of the province of Bukidnon, and straddles parts of the municipalities of Baungon, Talakag, Lantapan, Impasugong, Sumilao, Libona and Manolo Fortich and the city of Malaybalay.

The Natural Park is the major watershed that provides water for irrigation, power generation and domestic use for Bukidnon as well as the province of Misamis Oriental, and the catchment area of the Cagayan, Tagoloan and Pulangi river system. It is likewise the ancestral territory

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The Philippine brown deer

of the Talaandig, Higaonon and Bukidnon ethnolinguistic groups that share common historical and cultural ties with Mt. Kitanglad, which they consider the well-spring of their traditions.

The establishment of the Mt. Kitanglad Ranges as a full-fledged protected area on 9 November 2000 by virtue of Republic Act 8978, strengthens the protection of its ecological, biological, scientific and educational features. The peripheral buffer zone serves as an extra layer of protection for the park. The protected area covers portions of the city of Malaybalay and the municipalities of Impasugong, Sumilao, Manolo Fortich, Libona, Baungon, Talakag and Lantapan.

The Plant and Animal Life

The Natural Park has six major habitat types, ranging from lowland evergreen forest, which is the most species-rich forest formation; lower montane forest, upper montane (mossy) forest, grasslands, freshwater wetlands and caves. Every part of Mt. Kitanglad's habitat is considered precious not only for harbouring countless species but more for serving vital functions to its inhabitants.

The lower montane forest is characterised by a two-layered canopy. Trees in this habitat type are shorter in height than those found in lowland residual dipterocarp forest. In the upper montane (mossy) forest, trees are gnarled

and have a stunted growth with a more or less uniform height; trunks and branches are festooned and characterised by the presence of numerous species of mosses, lichens and ground epiphytic ferns. The brushland / grassland and cultivations are confined to the central lower portions of the park (CPPAP).

These forests and grasslands protect a sizable population of flora and fauna endemic to the Philippines, many of which are endangered like the Philippine eagle. Seventy-four avian species have been recorded, including some species that were found to be common during previous studies but are rarely observed at present. The list includes *Phapitreron amethystina*, *Macrophygia phasianella tenuirostris*, *Prioniturus discurus*, *Trichoglossus jhonstoniae*, *Harpactes ardens*, *Coracina mcgregori*, *Aceros leucocephalus*, and *Basilornis miranda*. Some species, however, appeared more abundant compared to earlier observations; these include *Lophozosterops goodfellowi*, *Hypocryptadius cinnamomeus*, *Leonardina woodi* and *Erythrura coloria*. Another species, *Serinus estherae* was recorded for the first time. Others include the Whitehead's Swiftlet, Mindanao Lorikeet, Mindanao Racquet-tail, Mindanao Scops-owl, Slaty-backed Jungle-flycatcher, Red-eared Parrot finch, Apo Myna, Philippine Brown Deer and the Mindanao Pygmy Fruit Bat (*Alionycteris paucidentata*).

On the other hand, 58 mammalian species are known to exist in Mt. Kitanglad, compared to 49 in the entire island of Negros. There were 13 species found to be endemic to the Park in contrast to only eight such species in Mt. Apo, the highest mountain in the country. The equally diverse amphibians and reptiles represent 26 species and 21 species respectively, with 50% endemicity. Birds have 159 known species and an exceptional composition of butterflies numbering about 131 species. Numerous bat species are also plentiful; in fact, the Mindanao Pygmy Fruit Bat, which is abundant and endemic to the park alone, is the first fruit bat species known in Asia.

Mt. Kitanglad supports the richest known vertebrate fauna (mammals and

birds) in the country (Heaney and Peterson 1992, Amoroso *et al.* 1996; L. Heaney, *unpublished manuscript*, as cited in Garrity, *et al.* 2002). Heaney and Peterson (1992), as cited in Garrity, *et al.* (2002), observed 13 of the 14 species of birds endemic to Mindanao, including the critically endangered Philippine Eagle. Very few mammalian and herpetological species were observed but this could be an artifact rather than a reflection of the real conditions in the area. Common species of the Families Suidae and Cervidae have become rare in the area because of the increased demand for meat by the local inhabitants.

The park also has an exceptional conservation value in terms of the high endemism of the vascular flora (Amoroso *et al.* 1996; Pipoly and Madulid, 1995, *personal communication*, as cited by Garrity, *et al.* 2002)). This includes the endangered rootless vascular plant *Tmesipteris lanceolata* Dang (Amoroso *et al.* 1996, as cited in Garrity, *et al.* 2002). The park was recently found to have the highest tree density ever reported in a tropical forest (Pipoly and Madulid, 1995, *pers. comm.*, as cited by Garrity, *et al.* 2002). This combination of a small, manageable size and a rich, singular biodiversity conforms to the type of protected ecosystem that, according to Sayer (1995), ought to receive the most determined attention in tropical biodiversity protection (Garrity, *et al.* 2002).

The Indigenous peoples

The indigenous communities consider Mt. Kitanglad as the centre of their well-being; they regard the mountain range as their ancestral domain - their history, myth and tradition revolve around it. Despite the influx of migrants and the impact of inculturation, they still manifest strong cultural traits in their activities and way of life. Their current livelihood practices determine the sustainability of the biodiversity conservation goals instituted in the Park.

They grow mostly root crops in the area, but some residents have also ventured into gathering rattan poles, weaving rattan and bamboo strips, abaca

production, and hunting. Though some 40% of the occupants engage in fishing in nearby creeks or rivers, their catch contributes very little to their daily subsistence.

In December 1998, the three main indigenous communities – the Tala-andig, Higa-onon and Bukidnon tribes – living within the areas of the Park, asserted their rights of ownership over the plant and wildlife resources of Mt. Kitanglad through a proclamation made during a programme that included a customary ritual where a boar and several heads of chicken were slaughtered. Accordingly, they hope to put the entire world on notice that they have first and prior rights over these resources as they are the ones who nurtured and conserved these resources over several generations. Thus, academic researchers or scientists who wish to have access to these resources would have to deal with the Council of Elders of the three tribes and comply with their requirements (Peria, E. *undated*).

In addition, the tribal communities, in particular the Tala-andig group, have started building cultural monuments within their ancestral domains in the Park to stop bio-piracy in the areas; preserve the cultural tradition of the people; and, organise and institutionalise indigenous leadership. The tribes themselves have become more vigilant against intrusions into their areas especially after they saw



A datu of Talaandig tribe patrols the park.

researchers gathering herbal plants for medicine research (Vanzi, 2000).

The Tala-andig community plans to build some 200 monuments or altars that they call *bangkasu*, where offerings to their gods are made. The first monument was built in a hidden spring at the foot of Mt. Apolang; the altar of the gods who keep honey, *bangkasu hu lalawag*, marks the traditional worship area of the Tala-andig community (Vanzi, 2000).

The second monument, the altar of the gods who protect wild animals, was erected at the eastern side of Kiabansag mountain while a third built at Kaatoan, Lantapan hopes to regain and strengthen the traditional worship area, which is now known as the Cinchona Reforestation project (Vanzi, 2000).

Park Management

The Office of the Protected Area Superintendent under the Department of Environment and Natural Resources directly supervises the day-to-day operations and management of Mt. Kitanglad. The Office works closely with the Protected Area Management Board (the governing body) and in partnership with Kitanglad Integrated NGOs or KIN.

Recognised as the host NGO of the Park in April 1996, the KIN is a consortium of five local NGOs organised in May 1995 with proven capability in various fields that include cultural, environmental and church-based programs, upland and tribal community welfare activities, as well as in cooperative and entrepreneurial social development aspects. KIN's focus in MKRNP is on reviving and strengthening the cultural integrity of local communities toward their socio-economic upliftment and capability enhancement to protect Mt. Kitanglad.

The NGO consortium was formally sanctioned to assist in the implementation of the Mt. Kitanglad Range National Park Community Resource Management Project, a component of the Conservation Priority of Protected Areas Project (CPPAP) of the World Bank-Global Environment Facility (WB-GLF) and the Government of the Philippines through the Department of Environment and Natural Resources

(DENR). Its over-all operation is premised on partnership and coordination with the Protected Area Staff (PAS) and the PAMB.

The Management Project envisions to protect and enhance the biodiversity of Mt. Kitanglad through sustained community-based economic, site stabilization and environmental conservation activities. To achieve a long-term conservation effort, the Project adopts key strategies that support site rehabilitation while ensuring the survival of community beneficiaries. The project also aims to promote local involvement in the protection of the mountain range.

For almost seven years, the Kitanglad project had been provided regular assistance from the CPPAP. When the project officially ended in June 2002, the PAMB was able to source funds from the Provincial Government of Bukidnon, which approved a P3 million assistance for forest protection work. Local governments with jurisdiction over Mt. Kitanglad have also expressed willingness to allocate varying amounts for the protected area, the total of which amounts to 2.8M pesos.

Before entering the Park, visitors are advised to drop by the Protected Area Superintendent Office (Telefax: (088) 813-3453; [email:mkrnp@mlbly.philcom.com.ph](mailto:mkrnp@mlbly.philcom.com.ph)) located within the DENR Compound at Malaybalay City, Bukidnon. Or while at Cagayan de Oro City, one can get information from the DENR Regional office there.

Climate

Temperature ranges from 22.7°C in January to 24.6 °C in June. It receives the highest amount of rainfall in June. The driest period is March.

The climate at the Kitanglad Ranges falls under the Modified Corona Classification, which is characterised by a short dry season usually lasting from one to three months, and no pronounced rainy season. The area is cloud-covered all year round.

How to get there

Access to the Province of Bukidnon is through Cagayan de Oro City. Daily plane flights from Manila and Cebu are

available. From Cagayan de Oro, the park can be reached by regular public jeepneys and buses plying the 99-km Cagayan-Bukidnon route. From Cagayan, Rural Tours and Bachelor Express leave for Malaybalay every hour. At least four trails that lead to the summits of Mt. Kitanglad and Mt. Dulang-dulang are described in another section below.

Park facilities/fees and guidelines

Park visitors are limited to only 15 persons at a given time and are allowed a maximum of two (2) days and one (1) night stay.

Mountaineers who trek the area can stay at the Visitors' Center at Sitio Intavas, La Fortuna, Impasugong, Bukidnon or at the renovated PAMB building at the summit. These nature centers are equipped with cooking utensils and sleeping paraphernalia. The fees are as follows:

- a. Overnight stay = P50.00 pesos/person
- b. Guide (serves also as the caretaker) = P300.00 pesos
- c. Additional P100.00 pesos for the use of the summit center to defray expenses for the electricity; a 100-watt bulb per bed capacity has been installed.

Porters, most of whom are residents of the barangays, are available at each entry point.

Visitors are advised to bring rainproof clothing and bags, camera, binoculars, hat, insect repellent, water, food as well as camping equipment for those wishing to stay a few days.

Visitors' Entrance Permit

All visitors are required to secure a permit from the Office of the Protected Area Superintendent. The administrative fees for the issuance of visitor's permit are as follows:

	Mt. Kitanglad	Mt. Dulang-Dulang
Students	P50.00/person	P15.00/person
Foreign Nationals	US\$ 15/person or peso equivalent	US\$ 15/person or peso equivalent
Professional	P85.00/person	P50.00/person

The PAMB has also set the administrative fees and governs specific visitor's activities at the Cinchona Forest Reserve, located at Kaatuan, Lantapan, Bukidnon. Entrance fees for a 12-hour duration is

P20.00 for Filipinos and P50.00 for foreigners.

Visitors shall undergo an orientation/briefing at the Protected Area Superintendent's Office prior to any scheduled climb. They shall then make a courtesy call on the barangay captain and tribal leader of the entry barangay. Before entering the park premises, specific conditions have to be met such as securing the Prior Informed Consent (PIC) of the concerned Indigenous Peoples, performing a ritual and coordinating with the local government units.



A Talaandig tribe performs the ritual of Panahod.

What to see and do

The recreational zone of Mt. Kitanglad offers potential attractions to foreign and local mountaineering enthusiasts. Regulated and responsible ecotourism activities are allowed. Trekking at the summit, camping and bird watching are among the favorite activities in the park.

Hiking

It is safe to scale the mountains all year round. Four trails lead to the mountain summits. For Mount Kitanglad summit, the first trail is located at Intavas, La Fortuna, Impasug-ong town; the second at Barangay Lupiagan, Municipality of Sumilao, while for Mount Dulang-dulang destination, the first trail starts at Bol-ogan,

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Songco and Kaatuan, Lantapan, Bukidnon, and the second trail is at Dalwangan, Malaybalay City.

Mount Kitanglad summit

Intavas Trail

The first trail is located at Sitio Intavas, La Fortuna, Impasugong. Sitio Intavas can be reached by any type of vehicle. It takes about an hour ride from Malaybalay City or a two-hour ride from Cagayan de Oro City to reach the sitio. The jump-off point is at Crossing Sta. Ana of Impasugong Municipality (located along Sayre Highway). Passenger jeepneys ply the Crossing Santa Ana – Intavas route daily.

There is a Visitor's Center at Sitio Intavas, which is manned by the Barangay Council of La Fortuna through its Barangay Chairman. The Sitio is about five km away from the foot of Mt. Kitanglad. From the foot, it is three km away to the summit of Mt. Kitanglad with a three- to five- hour regular walk.

Lupiagan Trail

Lupiagan trail is located at Barangay Lupiagan, Sumilao, Bukidnon. Sumilao is five kilometers away from the Kisolon Bus Terminal (located along Sayre Highway). From Sumilao, an eight-km road leads to Lupiagan, but is passable only by a four-wheel type vehicle. However, at present,

only a motorcycle locally called *habalhabal* is available to bring passengers from Sumilao up to the foot of Mt. Kitanglad.

Mount Dulang-dulang summit

Bol-ogan Trail

Bol-ogan trail is located at Sitio Bol-ogan, Songco, Lantapan. Public utility jeepneys ply the Malaybalay-Kibanggay route, passing the National Highway, the converging road network to the City of Iligan. From Malaybalay City, it takes an hour and a half to reach Crossing Bol-ogan.

Barangay Songco is approximately eight kilometres away from Crossing Aglayan (*Sayre Highway*). The road is well graveled and cemented at Lantapan proper.

Bol-ogan trail leads climbers to Mt. Dulang-dulang and a cross-country towards Mt. Kitanglad using the Intavas and or Lupiagan trails as the exit route (Information Hand Book, Mt. Kitanglad Range Natural Park)

Dalwangan Route

The trail although already established is quite difficult to traverse as it is not often used. For normal hikers, it will take half a day to reach the peak. There are no facilities in the area, thus one has to bring his/her camping gear.

Camping at Cinchona Forest Reserve.

Cinchona Forest Reserve at Kaatuan, Lantapan, Bukidnon is a favourite for campers. The reserve was established on 22 September 1936 per Presidential Proclamation No. 83 and covers an area of 1,914 hectares. It was declared as Kaatuan Forest Reserve for the experiment and propagation of quinine, forest protection and timber production. The forest is a habitat of the rare Green Maya and *Ratus ratus rabori*, the only rat of its kind in the world. The Reserve formed part of the Mt. Kitanglad protected area on 24 October 1996. The Mt. Kitanglad PAMB manages the site.

Birdwatching. The nesting site of the famous Philippine eagle is located at Sitio Mangasa, Dalwangan, Malaybalay City.



Campers at Mt. Kitanglad Range Natural Park



Philippine Eagle

The **Ecolodge at Sitio Lalawan**, also at Dalwangan, offers bird watching and camping activities. A tourist guide for birdwatchers is available.

Lusok Falls at Kalanganan, Baungon. A series of three falls with a height of 30-50 metres can be reached in two hours along a jungle trail with a distance of approximately four to five kilometres. The local government unit proposed the area for ecotourism activities.

Nabitag Falls at Sitio Lantud, Brgy Sagarán, Talakag, Buk. The falls measure 200 metres. It takes a 45-minute walk to the falls from Brgy Lantud through the forest. From Brgy Sagarán to Sitio Lantud, it takes a one-hour walk.

Sitio Tulugan, Songco, Lantapan. The place is home to the Talaandig tribe. The School of Living Tradition still exists. Here, one can find the various products from the art of weaving, handicraft production, rituals, dance and music. People entering sacred areas are required to participate in a cleansing ritual called "Pangawan".

Hot spring at Sitio Alas-as, Licoan, Sumilao, Bukidnon. It is located along

the Culaman River at Sitio Alas-as, Brgy. Licoan. The water is very hot that it can boil an egg (chicken) in less than 5 minutes. Although there is no trail going to the site, it can be reached from Brgy Licoan of the said municipality through a two-hour walk in the forest.

Other attractions around the Park (as recommended in the [clickmindanao website](#)):

- The *Del Monte Pineapple Plantation*, with an area of 90 km², is the largest pineapple plantation in the world where work in the field goes on 24/7. Vast tracts of land show different stages of crop production: while some are readied for planting, others have ripe fruits for harvesting. There is a Clubhouse and a Golf course within the plantation.
- *Mangima Canyon* in Monolo Fortich town on the road from Cagayan de Oro to Malaybalay has a zigzag road winding up and down the wide and deep canyon with naturally scenic surroundings.
- Just before reaching the next town of Impasugong on the national highway, a road branches southwest to Sumilao with several natural attractions: *hanging ladders* ascent a cliff wall of Mt. Palaspas



to the *multi-chambered Paiyak Cave*, an ancient native burial site; and *Alalum falls* with a cool spring at its base;

- Maagnao Spring Resort at Sitio Maagnao, Patag, Lantapan, Bukidnon;
- At Barangay Bangcud are *Matin-ao Spring*, a popular picnic spot, and *Nasuli Spring*, with a depth ideal for diving.
- South of Malaybalay is Valencia, where one can visit the *Napalit Lake* and the *Central Mindanao University*, a World Bank-subsidized agricultural school. The school is in the shadow of Musuan Peak. Napalit Lake, which is about 36 ha wide is at the foot of Kalatungan mountains. It stands out because of its 24 floating islets of varied sizes.
- Apo Lake in Barangay Guinoyoran, Valencia is a 25-ha lake surrounded by mountains. It is ideal for boating and fishing.
- The *Kaamulan* is a native term meaning “gathering for a purpose”. It is a week-long cultural festival during which the seven tribes of Bukidnon gather amidst a setting of pine trees, aptly called Pines View Park in Malaybalay City. It features dances, songs, oral traditions, mimetic, native force and wine in various reenacted rituals. Held every first week of March, the festival aims to foster unity among the tribes and understanding between them and the lowlanders. Ethnic groups trek down from their mountain villages in colorful costumes and spectacular headdresses to join in the singing and dancing, compete in indigenous sports, and perform traditional rituals. Among its highlights are a parade of the tribes followed by the *Pamalas*, a cleansing and purification ceremony, and *Alusod*,

the offering of native wine and food to visitors.

Where to stay

Other than the places mentioned above, the best hotels and resorts are usually located in Cagayan de Oro City and Malaybalay City. Rates are very reasonable with excellent services. ■

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