

FOREWORD
THE 6TH INTERNATIONAL HORNBILL CONFERENCE, MANILA
24 - 26 April, 2013

The 61 currently recognised species of hornbills in the avian order Bucerotiformes occur across Africa and Asia, but it is especially appropriate for two reasons that this International Hornbill Conference should have been held in the Philippines. First, the Philippines support 10 hornbill species, all of them endemic to these islands, and among them are the most threatened of all hornbill species (two Critically Endangered, two Endangered, one Vulnerable and two Near Threatened). Second, the Philippines is now home to the world's leading expert on hornbill systematics and evolution, 'JC' Gonzalez, and his paper that opens these proceedings informs us of at least three newly-recognised species of Philippine hornbill and the heightened levels of endangerment that these bring to this special regional avifauna.

This focus on a particular region of Asian hornbills is also in keeping with the strong representation of Asian delegates at the conference, since most of the other threatened hornbill species also occur in Asia (one Endangered, six Vulnerable, 11 Near Threatened), with the exception of three Vulnerable African species of which only the Southern Ground Hornbill was discussed by an American and the only two African delegates. Understandably, such a continental imbalance in concern about hornbill conservation is also reflected in the venues of conferences past (thrice in Thailand and once each in South Africa, Singapore and Philippines respectively) and future (Malaysia), with the Indian subcontinent an obvious candidate for later.

All species of Asian hornbills are rainforest-dwelling species and, since rainforests generally occur in warm, moist and productive habitats, these areas also support dense human populations. Asian rainforests occur mostly in patches, spread across continental areas and especially across the various chains of islands and peninsulae in the region. This makes the forests and their hornbills especially vulnerable to developmental pressures, most obviously so on the scattered and relatively small islands of the densely populated Philippines. In contrast, African hornbill species all occur on a single landmass, with most species spread across several countries, but even here it is among the rainforest species that most endangerment is emerging.

The 13 full papers included in this conference proceedings cover, between them, national assessments (2), local studies of particular species (5), novel regional conservation approaches (3), in and ex situ management skills (2) and particular threats (1).

Hopefully, all these efforts will stem the strong tides flowing against hornbills, especially in rainforests and mainly in Asia. Hornbills are spectacular and emblematic birds, deserving of our protection, their evolution and classification are now more comprehensively understood than for any other avian group, and innovative conservation approaches are continually being developed to redress their decline. May this conference's proceedings further accelerate their conservation, so that by the next conference in Sarawak we can report even more progress.

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