

Deterrent value of wildlife smuggling laws limited — DENR

March 3, 2020 | 10:13 pm

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THE Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) said wildlife smugglers are not deterred by the current set of penalties prescribed for them because violations are prosecuted as if they were “second-class crimes.”

Undersecretary Ernesto D. Adobo, Jr., a lawyer, said societal attitudes towards wildlife smuggling are unhelpful because they do not recognize the urgency of the issue.

“It is a victimless crime. People do not think about wildlife trafficking too much because they are just animals. Moreover, smugglers take the risk... because the illegal wildlife trade is just a second-class crime,” he said Tuesday.

Mr. Adobo was speaking to mark World Wildlife Day at the Ninoy Aquino Parks and Wildlife Center in Quezon City.

He said a bill that is pending in Congress that addresses the weaknesses of the wildlife regulatory regime.

“We already have a bill pending that we hope to be certified soon. It will institutionalize law enforcement (practices) against the illegal wildlife trade,” Mr. Adobo said.

Assistant Secretary Ricardo L. Calderon said that the DENR is being assisted by the Asian Development Bank and the US Agency for International Development (USAID) in the amendment of the Wildlife Resources Conservation and Protection Act or Republic Act (RA) 9147.

At the event, the DENR’s Biodiversity Management Bureau (BMB) and USAID unveiled a new digital tool to combat wildlife trafficking, with the soft launch of the beta test version of the WildALERT system.

The system consists of a mobile interface, a species library with 480 entries, and a report management platform to help users identify wildlife species to help them better fight wildlife crimes.

The system’s senior developer Fheter John B. Calanday said the testing process seeks to ensure that the Android-based app can work even on older-model phones.

“Very challenging *sa amin na gumana ’yung app sa mga lumang phone pero napagana namin* (It was very challenging for us to make an app that even old phones can run), but we did it so that it can be more accessible to law enforcers,” Mr. Calanday added.

App users can take photos and provide key information via the app’s reporting feature, which will then be sent to the WildALERT report management platform.

Reports can be accessed by the nearest DENR field units such as City Environment and Natural Resources Offices, Provincial Environment and Natural Resources Office and the BMB for appropriate action.

The system will be officially turned over to DENR by the end of March or early April. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**

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