

## DENR: Thriving waterbirds mean healthy Soccsksargen wetlands

By: Edwin O. Fernandez, Inquirer.net

TACURONG CITY — Environmental authorities in the Soccsksargen region had concluded that local wetlands are in good health as indicated by the still vibrant stock of waterbirds found in various sites.

On Tuesday and Wednesday, personnel of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) in Sultan Kudarat and Sarangani provinces held a simultaneous Asian waterbird census, which is done every January to monitor the condition of wetlands and the status of resident and migratory birds in the area.

Soccsksargen, formerly the central Mindanao region, is composed of the provinces of South Cotabato, Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat and Sarangani and the highly urbanized General Santos City.

The birds were monitored in Baras bird sanctuary in Tacurong City, Sultan Kudarat; Lake Buluan in Lutayan, Sultan Kudarat; and in various areas of Sarangani, according to DENR regional director Felix Alicer.

Badjury Mustapha, chief of the DENR's community environment and natural resources office in Tacurong, said the annual census seeks to monitor the population and distribution of waterbirds as well as the condition of the wetlands.

Mustapha identified the sighted species of birds as the great egret (*Ardea alba*) and black-crowned night heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) in Baras.

The great egret was also seen in Lake Buluan, along with Chinese egret (*Egretta eulophotes*), cattle egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) and Brahminy kite (*Haliastur indus*).

In eight sites of Sarangani, including the villages of Kawas of Alabel town, Badtasan in Kiamba and Old Poblacion in Maitum, among the waterbird species sighted included black-winged stilt, cinnamon bittern, whimbrel, common sandpiper, kentish plover, whiskered tern, lesser frigatebird, wandering whistling ducks, curlew and common ringed plover.

### Key indicators

Maria Elvira Lumayag, Sarangani provincial environment and natural resources officer, said the sighted species include resident and migratory birds that utilize wetlands for breeding, feeding and resting.

In Barangay Buayan of General Santos City, the census personnel counted 2,593 waterbirds during one observation trip.

The most common species that were observed during the census were the little egret (*Egretta garzetta*), great egret, black-winged stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*), lesser sand plover (*Charadrius mongolus*) and whistling ducks (*Dendrocygninae*).

“Their presence is one of the key indicators which tell whether wetlands, such as mangrove areas, are still ecologically healthy,” Alicer explained.