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PH to host world's largest wildlife conference in 2017

All roads lead to Manila in October for the 12th Conference of Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS-COP12), or more commonly abbreviated to Convention on Migratory Species (CMS).



The event will mark the first time the CMS conference will be held in Asia since the international treaty was adopted in Bonn, Germany in 1979 and came into force in 1985.

Lawyer Ernesto Adobo, Jr., undersecretary of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) said that around 1,000 participants from 124 countries which are parties to the convention are expected to attend the CMS-COP12. They consist of high-level dignitaries and representatives from various organizations, private companies, and institutions recognized as champions of migratory species.

Adobo is also the chairman of the Inter-agency Committee created to manage the Philippines' hosting of the conference, which is slated for October 23-28 at the Philippine International Convention Center in Pasay City.

The DENR, through its Biodiversity Management Bureau (BMB), is the primary government agency tasked to ensure the success of the conference, which carries the theme: **"Their Future is Our Future – Sustainable Development for Wildlife and People."**

"The Philippines is proud to host this year's largest wildlife conference, which is geared towards providing greater protection to migratory species," Adobo said during the media briefing held Tuesday at the DENR in Quezon City.

He also said that the Philippines acceded to the convention in 1993 by virtue of Philippine Senate Resolution No. 28. The BMB serves as the focal agency for the implementation of the agreement.

He added the event was aligned with the Philippine Development Plan, particularly on the key result area on Integrity of the Environment and Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation.

"The COP presents an opportunity for our country to work with other parties to the convention on strategies and programs to protect migratory species and enhance transboundary cooperation on migratory species management," said Adobo.

Undersecretary Jonas Leones of the DENR's International Affairs shared the importance of conserving migratory species, which are constantly threatened to extinction by hunting, pollution, fish by-catch, habitat loss, and collision with man-made structures, among others.

Leones said that being a party to the CMS brings benefits especially in terms of ecotourism, collaborative research among range states, policy formulation on managing species and sites, and providing access to international cooperation and conservation funds.

He stated that the COP meets only once every three years, with the last one hosted by Quito, Ecuador in November 2014.

Leones added that the Philippines is the only ASEAN country that is party to the CMS. “With the hosting of the COP12, the country is hoping to convince other countries in the region to accede to the convention,” he added.

Meanwhile, BMB Director Theresa Mundita Lim explained that the Philippines will put forward several resolutions for consideration during the COP12. These include the placing of the *butanding* or whale shark and the Christmas frigatebird on Appendix I, and the yellow bunting, black noddy, and the whole population of white-spotted wedgefish on Appendix II.

Appendix I species are those threatened with extinction and are strictly protected globally by CMS parties. Appendix II, on the other hand, lists species which may not be highly threatened or endangered but need conservation through international agreements.

Also being pushed for discussion during the event are resolutions promoting marine protected area networks in the ASEAN region; sustainable tourism, including ecotourism, for poverty reduction and environmental protection; and the conservation of critical intertidal and other coastal habitats for migratory species.

Lim said that COP12 would serve as “prime opportunity” for the Philippines to showcase its important role as host to a number of migratory species found in coastal, marine, wetland and forest ecosystems across the archipelago.

As part of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, with over 150 species of migratory birds that annually visit the country’s migratory sites such as the Olango Island Wildlife Sanctuary in Cebu, the Negros Occidental Wetland Conservation Area, Naujan Lake in Oriental Mindoro, and the Las Piñas-Parañaque Critical Habitat and Ecotourism Area in Metro Manila.

Lim added that five of the world’s eight marine turtle species can be found in Philippine waters. These are the loggerhead turtle, olive ridley turtle, hawksbill turtle, leatherback turtle, and the green sea turtle.

She cited the Turtle Island in Tawi-Tawi province, which lie at the southwestern tip of the country, as the remaining and largest nesting site of a significant population of green sea turtles in the entire ASEAN region.

The COP is the CMS’ main decision-making body and meets every three years to adopt policies and laws and propose new species under the framework. ###