

Community Insights on the *Maomag*: A Focused Ethnography of Tarsier Conservation in Corella, Bohol

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ABSTRACT

The Philippine tarsier faces significant conservation challenges due to habitat destruction, limited public awareness, and sociopolitical barriers. Understanding how local communities perceive the tarsier and its conservation is crucial for developing effective, community-driven strategies to protect this species. This study provides a closer examination of the perceptions of local community members regarding Philippine tarsiers and their conservation efforts. Employing focused ethnography and in-depth interviews with key informants, the study revealed the community to have demonstrated substantial knowledge about Philippine Tarsiers, including their characteristics and conservation challenges, gained through both formal and informal sources. However, it acknowledged gaps due to barriers like limited education. While recognizing the environmental, cultural, and economic benefits of tarsier conservation, it identified threats such as habitat destruction, a lack of community support, and government limitations. It highlighted the need for improved awareness, engagement, and external support to enhance conservation efforts.

Keywords: *Focused ethnography, Philippine tarsier, tarsier conservation, community perceptions, Bohol*

INTRODUCTION

Of the estimated 50,000 vertebrate species, the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species estimates that 48% of amphibians, 27% of mammals, and 13% of birds are threatened with extinction, reflecting the precarious state in which the world's wildlife currently finds itself. Bennett et al. (2002) named hunting and habitat loss "the twin threats to wildlife worldwide." While hunting may have particular benefits as a source of food, it also serves as a method of controlling crop depredators and as a source of income, especially in developing communities (Chardonnet et al., 2002),

unmanaged hunting may have severely adverse effects, primarily among those being biodiversity loss (World Wildlife Fund, n.d.). Habitat loss is often caused by excess human activities such as clearing for agriculture, mining, logging, and urban sprawl (World Wildlife Fund, 2013). Chardonnet et al. (2002) also cite a lack of community engagement, deterioration of tools used for work, and misconceptions in the legal framework as minor threats to wildlife safety.

The Philippine government has implemented several measures to protect endangered species, primarily through the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR). A key legislative framework is Republic Act No. 9147, or the Wildlife Resources Conservation and Protection Act, which aims to conserve and protect wildlife species and their habitats (Republic Act No. 9147, 2001). Under this act, the DENR is responsible for regulating the collection and trade of wildlife, pursuing international commitments to wildlife protection, and supporting scientific studies on biodiversity conservation. Additionally, the DENR has established protected areas and critical habitats to safeguard endangered species, such as the Philippine tarsier, which is listed as a specially protected faunal species (Proclamation No. 1030, 1997). Collaborations with private sectors and non-governmental organizations further enhance conservation efforts, exemplified by partnerships to save plant and animal species from extinction (DENR, 2023).

The Philippine tarsier (*Carlito syrichta*), locally known as *maomag*, is a species of tarsier endemic to the islands of Bohol, Samar, and Leyte. It was proclaimed to be a specially protected faunal species of the country in 1997 (Proclamation No. 1030, 1997). Despite this, it still faces its share of threats. In 2013, *Inquirer.net* reported that the Philippine tarsier's fame made people want to own them as pets. This has led to incidents, such as one in 2016, wherein an airport policeman was caught trying to smuggle 47 rare specimens, including the Philippine tarsier, to Japan (Auto, 2016). Another such incident was that of a tarsier that was caged initially and cared for before a scheduled flight back to Bohol to prepare for a possible reintroduction to the wild, being found dead on a golf course at Forbes Park (Yap, 2013). Another threat to tarsiers could be typhoons, a phenomenon widespread in the Philippines. For example, super typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda) caused a significant decrease in the density of tarsiers in Corella, Bohol

(Gursky et al., 2017). After 2021's super typhoon Odette, the Bohol Tarsier Conservation Area reported that 2 out of 150 tarsiers were spotted after the typhoon (Severo, 2021).

Considering the Philippine tarsier's status as a near-threatened species due to habitat loss and human activities, the Philippine government has taken significant steps to protect it. Aside from 1997's Proclamation No. 1030, the Philippine Tarsier Foundation, Inc. (PTFI), a non-profit organization established in 1996, plays a pivotal role in these conservation efforts, dedicated to preserving the tarsier and its natural habitat. PTFI manages the Philippine Tarsier and Wildlife Sanctuary in Corella, Bohol, which spans approximately 8.4 hectares of protected forest land (Philippine Tarsier Foundation, n.d.). Established in 1996 with the purpose of conservation and education about the Philippine tarsier, the sanctuary provides a natural environment where tarsiers can thrive, free from the threats of deforestation and poaching. Visitors to the sanctuary are offered guided tours to observe tarsiers in their natural habitat, promoting education and awareness about the species and the importance of biodiversity conservation (Philippine Tarsier Foundation, n.d.).

As such, the results of this study will benefit three stakeholders: the local community of Canapnapan, its barangay government, and the Philippine Tarsier and Wildlife Sanctuary. Firstly, the collected data can aid the local community in fostering community engagement, supporting conservation initiatives, and promoting education about the Philippine tarsier. This involvement can help develop responsible tourism management practices and ensure that the community actively participates in and benefits from informed conservation efforts. Secondly, the data can assist the local government unit (LGU) in creating and reinforcing policies to support tarsier conservation education and efforts. Using the study's results, the LGU can implement effective strategies to promote conservation and sustainable development in coordination with the community. Lastly, the data collected can aid the Philippine Tarsier and Wildlife Sanctuary in assessing their conservation methods and identifying areas for improvement. It can help determine future opportunities for community education and involvement by evaluating the collected data regarding the community's current perceptions of tarsiers and their conservation.

However, there are gaps in existing studies, particularly in the community's perceptions of the Philippine tarsier and its conservation. It is worth noting that some of the most notable studies about tarsiers in Corella (Cañete, 2003; Aure & Escabi-Ruiz, 2005) were both conducted almost two decades ago. This necessitates the need for more recent data about the subject matter. Furthermore, while both studies touched upon the perception of the local community on the tarsier, this study will differ in that it intends to focus solely on these perceptions. Thus, this proposed study will examine how the Philippine tarsier and its conservation efforts are perceived by the local community of Barangay Canapnapan, Corella. More specifically, the following research questions guided the investigation:

1. How informed is the local community about tarsiers and their conservation needs?
2. What do they perceive as the biggest threats to tarsier conservation?
3. How do they view the importance of tarsier conservation?
4. What role do they believe they play in tarsier conservation efforts?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Community perceptions in conservation. Community perceptions in conservation refer to a community's collective understanding, attitudes, and beliefs regarding environmental conservation and sustainability efforts. These perceptions are significant because they can determine the level of community engagement, support, and participation in conservation projects (Bennett, 2016). Theoretical frameworks such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and the Community-Based Social Marketing (CBSM) model offer insights into how community perceptions can shape conservation behaviors. TPB suggests that an individual's behavior is directly influenced by their attitude towards the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, all of which are shaped by community perceptions (Ajzen, 1991).

Similarly, CBSM emphasizes the importance of understanding community attitudes and beliefs to effectively design and implement behavior change strategies for conservation (McKenzie-Mohr, 2011). Successful conservation efforts driven by positive

community perceptions include the Namibia-based wildlife conservation program, where local communities have been empowered to manage and benefit from wildlife resources, leading to increased wildlife populations and improved livelihoods (Naidoo et al., 2016). Another example is Nepal's participatory forest management initiative, where community involvement and positive perceptions of conservation efforts have led to significant improvements in forest cover and biodiversity (Acharya, 2002).

Factors influencing community perceptions. Cultural and historical significance, economic impact, education and awareness, and human-wildlife conflict influence community perceptions of conservation efforts. Cultural beliefs and historical ties to certain species are crucial in shaping how communities perceive conservation initiatives. For instance, in India, the tiger holds significant cultural and religious importance, being revered in Hindu mythology and considered a national symbol, which has facilitated conservation efforts by garnering community support for protecting this culturally significant species (Madhusudan & Mishra, 2003). Conversely, species perceived as threats or nuisances may face negative perceptions, which can complicate conservation strategies. In Australia, the dingo is both a cultural icon and a pest, leading to conflicting community perceptions (Smith & Appleby, 2018). Economic impact is another important factor, as communities are more likely to support conservation initiatives when they perceive tangible economic benefits, such as ecotourism and employment opportunities (Salafsky et al., 2001).

Ecotourism provides financial incentives for communities to protect wildlife and natural habitats, enhancing support for conservation. Education and awareness are also vital, as educational programs can increase awareness of conservation's ecological and economic benefits, fostering positive attitudes and behaviors toward environmental preservation (Jacobson et al., 2006). Effective education programs often involve local communities in participatory approaches, empowering individuals to participate actively in conservation efforts. Finally, human-wildlife conflict is a significant factor, as conflicts such as crop raiding by elephants or livestock predation by large carnivores can lead to negative perceptions of wildlife, hindering conservation efforts. Addressing these conflicts is crucial for improving community perceptions and fostering support for conservation initiatives (Dickman, 2010).

Challenges and barriers. Sociopolitical factors, economic constraints, and communication gaps collectively pose significant challenges and barriers to effective conservation efforts and community engagement. Sociopolitical factors can significantly influence community perceptions of conservation initiatives, as local politics and policies either support or hinder these efforts depending on the priorities of political leaders and stakeholders (Berkes, 2007). For instance, in Costa Rica, political support and favorable ecotourism policies have fostered positive community perceptions and involvement in conservation (Stem et al., 2003). In contrast, political opposition, as seen with Brazil's environmental regulations, can lead to resistance, deforestation, and negative community attitudes (Fearnside, 2017).

Economic constraints further complicate conservation efforts, as financial limitations restrict project implementation and reduce the community's capacity for involvement (Walpole & Wilder, 2008). In economically unstable regions, communities often prioritize immediate survival needs over conservation, leading to negative perceptions when direct benefits are not evident (Adams et al., 2004). Financial barriers are particularly impactful where communities depend on natural resources for their livelihoods, making economic survival seem more urgent than conservation (Walpole & Wilder, 2008).

Lastly, communication gaps impede effective engagement, as differences in language, cultural understanding, and access to information can lead to misunderstandings (Robinson & Makupa, 2015). Conservation organizations may struggle with culturally sensitive messaging, which can impact the effectiveness of their initiatives (Jacobson et al., 2007). Addressing these gaps requires participatory approaches incorporating local knowledge and perspectives, ensuring communication strategies are culturally relevant and context-specific to enhance community understanding and support for conservation (Reed, 2008; Jacobson et al., 2007).

Strategies to enhance community perceptions. Enhancing community perceptions of conservation efforts requires effective strategies that foster engagement, education, and economic incentives. These are essential for building positive attitudes and securing community support for conservation initiatives. Community engagement and participation are critical, as involving local communities in the decision-making

process ensures that conservation initiatives address their needs and perspectives, leading to increased support and collaboration (Reed, 2008). Participatory approaches, such as community-based conservation programs, empower local stakeholders by giving them a voice in managing natural resources and sharing the benefits of conservation (Berkes, 2004). For instance, Namibia's community-based natural resource management program has successfully engaged local communities in wildlife conservation, resulting in increased wildlife populations and improved local livelihoods (Naidoo et al., 2016).

Education and outreach programs also play a vital role in shaping community perceptions and increasing awareness of conservation issues. These programs aim to inform and educate community members about the importance of conservation, its benefits, and ways they can contribute (Jacobson et al., 2007). Effective educational initiatives often involve interactive and participatory methods that engage community members and address local concerns, such as environmental education programs integrated into school curricula and community workshops focusing on conservation practices and benefits (Monroe et al., 2019; Berkes, 2004).

Additionally, economic incentives are a powerful tool for enhancing community perceptions and support for conservation efforts. Providing financial benefits through conservation programs, such as ecotourism and sustainable resource management, can motivate communities to participate in and support conservation initiatives by demonstrating tangible benefits like job creation, increased income, and improved livelihoods (Walpole & Wilder, 2008). By aligning conservation goals with economic interests, these programs can enhance community support and foster positive perceptions of conservation efforts (Salafsky et al., 2001).

METHODS

Research design. The research design employed for this study is a focused ethnography. Knoblauch (2003) defines focused ethnography as a type of ethnography that focuses on small elements of society, characterized by its shorter duration and intensive data collection, among other features, which produces an account that explores how local beliefs, practices, and values shape community perspectives on conservation efforts. In

the context of this research, focused ethnography is the most appropriate research design because the paper has a specific focus: the local community’s perceptions of Philippine tarsiers and their conservation. My ethnographic account of the issue investigation was also enriched by being a local who grew up in the community.

Research setting. This research was conducted on-site at Barangay Canapnapan in Corella, Bohol (Figure 1). This barangay was chosen as the research setting because of its proximity to the Philippine Tarsier and Wildlife Sanctuary, located in the same barangay in a timberland area approximately 20-30 minutes from Tagbilaran City (Figure 2).

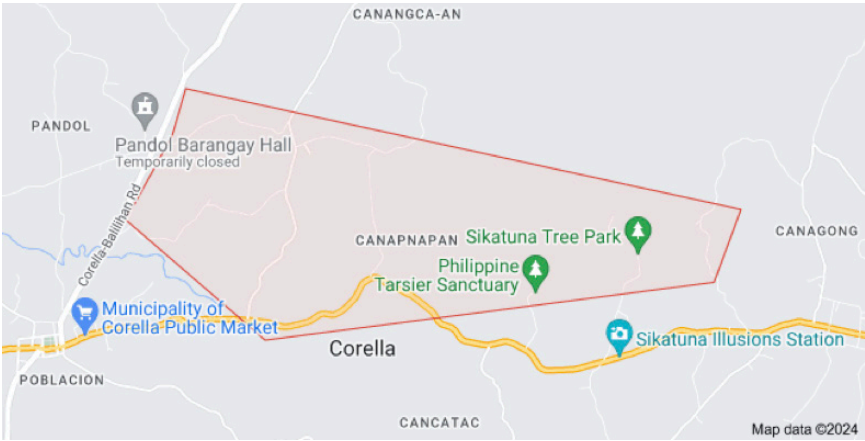


Figure 1. Map of Canapnapan, Corella, Bohol (Google, 2024)



Figure 2. The Philippine Tarsier & Wildlife Sanctuary (Philippine Tarsier & Wildlife Sanctuary, 2005).

Study participants and sampling. Since the study hinges on the perspectives of the local community, the key informants consisted of barangay residents. In order to qualify for participation in the study, the key informant must be at least 18 years of age and must have been a resident of the barangay for no less than 10 years. While the original intention was to have five key informants, additional data necessitated the inclusion of seven instead.

Purposive sampling was used to select key informants, as I intended to choose them based on their qualifications to participate in the study. When the needed data could not be immediately obtained, the snowballing method was employed, as my key informants knew other individuals not included in my initial list who were also qualified to participate and provide any necessary additional information. As a resident, I leveraged my connections in the barangay to ensure that the selected respondents were suitable for the study.

Research tools and data gathering procedures. The data gathering was divided into two distinct stages. The first stage consisted of interviews with my initial list of study participants, which were half-structured and translated into Cebuano for the participants' convenience. Half-structured interviews offer the dual benefits of not only allowing me to ask the questions I want to ask but also providing leeway to ask additional questions based on the subsequent data collected. These interviews were conducted in person, with audio recordings made to aid in transcribing and analyzing the data.

The need for additional data and certain clarifications arose, so the second stage comprised interviewing participants whose responses needed further clarification. In addition to conducting interviews, I also conducted document analysis. Since I was not given access to any documents from the barangay or the sanctuary, I turned to two journal articles: "Tarsier Talk: Tarsiers, Hunters, and Ecotourism in Corella" by Aure and Escabi-Ruiz (2005) and "How Does Species Endangerment Begin?" *Tarsier Conservation, Eco-tourism, and Farmers in Two Towns in the Province of Bohol, Philippines*, by Cañete (2003), as supplementary references. These were the only accessible studies that could provide additional context to the perspectives of the local community.

Data analysis procedure. I applied narrative analysis, particularly narrative thematic analysis, to examine and interpret the data. Narrative thematic analysis

involves analyzing the content within the text, and, like most other variants of narrative analysis, it does not have set procedures (Butina, 2015). The narrative thematic analysis I conducted began with familiarization, or repeated readings, to gain a holistic understanding. Following this, I generated initial codes systematically, labeling text segments relevant to the research question. Codes were organized into potential themes, refined through iterative reviews and discussions, and then defined and named. Finally, a comprehensive narrative was constructed, incorporating the identified themes and supporting evidence. It is compatible with the study because much of the data may come in narrative form, so this was the most appropriate analysis method.

Ethical considerations. One ethical issue that was taken into account was that sensitive information was divulged by participants during data collection, which might pose risks to their safety and mine. To guarantee the safety, privacy, and confidentiality of myself and my research participants, measures were taken, such as obtaining written consent from all participants, ensuring they were informed that their interviews were recorded via audio, and requesting that they opt to refer to themselves in the discussion by pseudonyms. All audio recordings of the participants and written notes were disposed of immediately after the data were analyzed and the report was completed.

RESULTS

The data analysis revealed participants' awareness and knowledge about the Philippine tarsier, the factors they identified as threats to its conservation, their reasons for considering tarsier conservation important or unimportant to the community, and potential ways to enhance community involvement in conservation efforts.

Community awareness and knowledge. The study participants from Canapnapan, Corella, shared a collective familiarity with the Philippine tarsier, having all seen the species, primarily in enclosures within Bohol (Figure 3). While many modestly claimed limited knowledge, their accounts indicated an understanding of essential biological and behavioral traits, such as the tarsier's nocturnal habits, small size, forest-dwelling nature, and sensitivity to noise. One key informant explained that these traits were

“common knowledge,” saying they only knew that tarsiers were nocturnal, very small, lived in trees, and were sensitive to noise: “I don’t know much, but they’re nocturnal, really small, live in trees, and are sensitive to noise, so I think that’s common knowledge.” (Mark, 24, personal interview, 23 July 2024).

Beyond biological traits, participants recognized the impact of human activities on tarsiers, particularly regarding conservation and cultural significance. They were aware of the species’ endangered status and its broader distribution beyond Bohol, with Soling (57, personal interview, 3 August 2024) expressing surprise at this information: “Tarsiers aren’t just in Bohol? They are also in other places in Visayas and Mindanao.” This awareness extended to cultural beliefs about the tarsier’s elusive nature.



Figure 3. *Philippine Tarsier (Carlito syrichta)* (yeowatzup, 2021).

Eding (45, in-person interview, 1 August 2024) described how difficult it was to spot tarsiers in the wild and shared a local belief that seeing one outside the sanctuary

was considered lucky: “It’s hard to look for tarsiers, especially if you look in the trees. That’s why if you see a tarsier outside the sanctuary, you’re lucky”. He further recounted how these cultural beliefs once stopped him from catching a tarsier he encountered in the wild. Although he was about to capture it, his companion warned of possible retribution from supernatural beings, and his mother’s strong belief in such superstitions made him reconsider:

I saw one. I was about to catch it. But my companion said that we might be punished by supernatural beings. My mother really believes in that stuff, so I was scared. I didn’t touch it.

When discussing how the community is informed about tarsier conservation, key informants cited modern information sources like social media, the internet, and personal research. Formal education was mentioned, but some participants highlighted gaps in their schooling about tarsiers. Mark (24, personal interview) noted that people often relied on social media or stock knowledge for information because tarsiers were not widely discussed in schools in Corella or Bohol:

“In times like these, it’s stock knowledge or social media. If the teaching style hasn’t changed, maybe the tarsier still isn’t being discussed in schools in Corella or in Bohol. So just like me, people probably only know the basics.”

Similarly, Eding (45, personal interview) reflected on his limited knowledge, which he attributed to lapses in education and a lack of formal teaching about tarsiers during his time in public school:

“I can’t speak for the entire community. But if I were the basis, since I’m from Canapnapan, I don’t know much about that. It might be because it wasn’t discussed when I was in school, or because we weren’t taught properly about it since I went to public school. Everything I know is from my personal experience.”

My key informants suggested leveraging digital platforms and enhancing formal education to improve community awareness. Mark (24, personal interview) emphasized the accessibility of online resources, explaining that the internet made it easy to find information with just a few clicks, such as through social media. “Social media. The internet, since everything is a Google click away nowadays. It’s easy to find the information you’re looking for when you put your mind to it. There are plenty of educational videos about the tarsier on YouTube, for sure.”

On the other hand, Lilia (49, personal interview, 25 August 2024) suggested that incorporating tarsiers into school curricula could help younger generations learn about them: “At school, if they’ve already included tarsiers in what they teach the kids.” Additionally, some key informants highlighted the sanctuary as a valuable resource, with Oyong (54, personal interview, 24 August 2024) explaining how visits there provided an opportunity to learn from experts: “I learned because of the sanctuary. If you can find the time to visit, you’ll learn a lot because they’re experts over there.” This combination of digital resources has improved both formal education and experiential learning at the sanctuary, reflecting the community’s reliance on modern and traditional methods to enhance its understanding of the Philippine tarsier and its conservation needs.

Perceived threats. During discussions about perceived threats to tarsier conservation, key informants frequently highlighted environmental and human-related challenges. Environmental threats were a primary concern, emphasizing how human irresponsibility, such as environmental destruction, negatively impacts tarsier populations outside the sanctuary. Mark (24, personal interview) explained:

“Destroying the environment is the biggest threat. Even if organizations or the government exert effort, it’s useless as long as people stay irresponsible.”

Human-related threats included both community and institutional factors. Apathy within the community was a recurring theme, with some key informants stating that many locals did not care about conservation efforts. As Lilia (49, personal interview) put it: “Frankly speaking, people don’t care.” Others pointed out a general lack of awareness about existing initiatives, with Maria (36, personal interview, 24 July 2024) admitting uncertainty about whether the local government or barangay had undertaken

any conservation activities: “I don’t know for sure if the barangay or LGU has done anything, so I can’t fully say that there wasn’t any support.”

Institutional challenges, particularly limitations on government involvement, were a recurring concern among key informants. They noted that the sanctuary’s private status restricted government action, while the community often relied too heavily on the sanctuary or authorities. As Lilia (49, personal interview) stated: “The sanctuary is there—it’s their job.” This dependence, coupled with low community engagement, worsened the problem.

Social barriers also hindered conservation efforts. Key informants attributed widespread apathy to limited exposure and inadequate information about tarsier conservation. Maria (36, personal interview) observed: “Honestly, tarsier conservation doesn’t have much exposure. And if there’s no exposure, there isn’t much knowledge about it.”

Economic and institutional factors also played a role. Livelihood needs often drove harmful activities, such as deforestation, and those involved were difficult to stop due to the support of powerful backers. Eding (45, personal interview) explained: “The people cutting trees, carrying out clearings (...). It’s hard to stop them. They’re just earning a living, and they usually have powerful backers.”

Government inaction was another significant issue, tied to the sanctuary’s private ownership and low community prioritization of tarsier conservation. As Lilia (49, personal interview) noted, “If it isn’t a priority of the people, it isn’t a priority of the government. (...) If it isn’t a priority, there won’t be any programs or funding for it.”

Some key informants reflected on their limited awareness of conservation issues. Maria (36, personal interview). acknowledged, realizing the severity of these threats only during the interview, questioning how others might remain unaware:

“I only thought about it properly during your interview. If I only considered it now, what about others who aren’t part of your interviews? (...) If they can’t think about it, they won’t care about it.”

Others described personal steps they had taken to learn more. For instance, Oyong (54, personal interview), inspired by a sanctuary visit, did research about the

tarsier conservation online: “After visiting the sanctuary, I Googled it. That’s when I fully realized tarsiers were endangered. This is what’s happening.”

These reflections emphasize the critical need for increased personal and community awareness. Key informants who engaged with sanctuary staff or conducted their research developed a stronger understanding of conservation issues, demonstrating how knowledge fosters greater concern and action.

Importance of tarsier conservation. When asked why tarsier conservation was or was not important to the community, most key informants believed it was important for various reasons. Only one key informant offered a dissenting opinion on human influence. While the tarsier brought benefits to the community, the community’s actions (or the lack thereof, as perceived by the respondent) for the tarsier’s benefit indicated that it was not a priority for the community.

“Tarsiers really are important because if it isn’t protected and they run out, there will be no more visitors. But if we look at what the community has done about tarsiers? I haven’t seen anything. With that, I can say that it isn’t important or our priority.” (Oyong, 54, personal interview).

Others emphasized the tarsier’s sociocultural and economic impact. Maria noted its cultural significance as a symbol of Canapnapan, Corella, and Bohol: “Tarsiers are like symbols (...) part of our cultural heritage.” (Maria, 36, personal interview). Similarly, Eding (45, personal interview) underscored its role in attracting tourists: “Tourists come here because the tarsier is here.”

Another theme that emerged during the discussions on the importance of tarsier conservation to the community was the environmental influence on how the key informants determined whether or not tarsier conservation was important to the community. The environmental importance of tarsiers also resonated. They cited the tarsier’s endangered status and endemism as reasons for conservation. Mark (24, personal interview) remarked: “If I’m not mistaken, tarsiers are endangered.” Others stressed the obligation to protect nature, as Lilia (49, personal interview) explained: “That’s why it’s important to care for it. It’s part of nature.”

These statements reflect that, beyond other forms of significance to the community in terms of culture and economy, the community of Canapnapan nevertheless believes that tarsier conservation is important to the community simply because it benefits the environment and nature. This demonstrates an understanding that the Philippine tarsier is more than what it means culturally or financially for the community. It is also an integral piece of the community's ecosystem.

When discussing the benefits of conservation, participants identified tangible and intangible advantages. Tangible benefits included environmental roles, such as maintaining ecosystem balance and economic gains from tourism. Maria (36, personal interview) noted: "If tarsier conservation continues, tourists won't leave." Pabing (68, personal interview) added that tourism boosts not just Canapnapan and Corella but all of Bohol. "As long as tarsiers are here, we'll have income."

On the other hand, the intangible benefits cited by key informants largely consisted of the cultural significance of the Philippine tarsier to the local community, as well as on a larger scale. One respondent shared that the tarsier is a "cultural heritage" that needs protection.

"I have a grandchild. It would be nice if there were still tarsiers for me to show to her when she grows up. Nature is part of what we pass on to those after us. That is why we need to conserve it." (Soling, 57, personal interview).

Another key informant considered the tarsier as what gives fame to the community and the province, making its conservation necessary. Oyong (54, personal interview) remarked: *Naa man diay tarsier sa laing probinsya, pero kita ramay natanyag o kanang, nailado tungod ana.* (There are tarsiers in other provinces, but we are the only ones famous for it). However, when asked how the community would be affected if the tarsiers were no longer in the area, one theme that emerged was the positive effects of such a loss. This came from the answer of Eding (45, personal interview), whose occupation was farming:

"As a farmer, maybe I might have fellow farmers who would say that if tarsiers were gone, then there would be no more pests in our crops."

Another theme that emerged during these discussions was the potential negative effects of the possible extinction of tarsiers. One point mentioned by key informants was how the environment would be negatively impacted due to the loss of tarsiers. Mark (24, personal interview) explained, “Aw, the ecosystem will not be balanced.” Another recurring negative effect was the economic repercussions of tarsier loss to the community. Some study participants discussed the repercussions, such as the loss of tourist presence in the community. Lilia (49, personal interview) warned: “What will the tourists visit if there are no tarsiers?”

Meanwhile, Eding (45, personal interview) also discussed how the loss of tarsiers would have a negative financial impact on the community and directly connected it to the possible loss of tourist presence. He explained: “It would be a big loss to Bohol and Corella because we’re a tourist province. Tourists are a big part of our economy.” Moreover, the loss of tourist presence, particularly in the community of Canapnapan, Corella, would mean that the income that used to enter the community would be redirected to other places with a notable tarsier population. Soling (57, personal interview) expounded: “The income that we get because of that will transfer to other places with tarsiers.”

The last negative effect that emerged was the cultural implications, or what having no tarsiers in the area anymore would mean for the community’s culture. Pabing (68, personal interview) emphasized: “We will lose why Bohol or Corella is known (...) the tarsier is like a province symbol.” Since the tarsier has already become a prominent cultural symbol for the local community and the province, its loss would be a huge hit to the cultural fabric of Canapnapan, Corella, and the province of Bohol.

Community involvement. When asked what role they believed the community played in the conservation of tarsiers, one prevalent theme was that some community members felt they played a passive role. This involves more indirect acts of support, such as backing institutions like the sanctuary and the government or expressing general support for tarsier conservation. One participant explained: “Since we have a tarsier sanctuary in Corella, our role as the place that has the sanctuary is to support any activities the sanctuary has related to tarsier conservation.” (Mark, 24, personal interview). This perspective highlights the community’s tendency to rely on existing

institutions, which they perceive as better equipped to lead conservation initiatives.

In contrast to this passive stance, another theme from key informants was the active role the community could or should take in conserving the Philippine tarsier. These responses emphasized direct action, ranging from religious and moral responsibility to advocacy efforts. Eding (45, personal interview) cited a Biblical basis for conservation: "If we base it on the Bible, God told Adam that we should care for His creations. So, our role is to take care of creation, which includes the tarsier."

Others suggested that the community should take political action, such as urging local officials to prioritize tarsier conservation. As Lilia (49, personal interview) noted, "Didn't I say earlier that this isn't a priority for the government? (...) Perhaps our role, as voters, is to convince the officials to give attention to the situation of the tarsiers."

Key informants also highlighted challenges the community faced in participating in conservation efforts. A common theme was the lack of awareness and engagement. Mark (24, personal interview) pointed out: "I don't know of any program for that, so what more for the other people here? That's probably the biggest challenge here." This reflects gaps in public awareness about conservation initiatives and engagement issues, such as apathy or a lack of time and opportunities for community involvement.

Another prominent theme was institutional barriers. Key informants observed that local authorities often avoided involvement in tarsier conservation due to the sanctuary being privately owned. Soling (57, personal interview) explained: "The barangay probably doesn't want to get involved because the sanctuary is private. That's likely why there aren't many activities in Canapnapan, as far as I know, related to protecting the tarsiers." Some key informants linked this lack of local government action to the sanctuary's self-sufficiency. Lilia (49, personal interview) noted: "They (the sanctuary) have their own funding. Maybe they don't need help from the government anymore. That's probably why the government also seems indifferent."

When asked about additional initiatives the community could take, suggestions included people-led efforts, youth involvement, and heightened awareness campaigns. Mark (24, personal interview) envisioned simple acts of collaboration, saying: "It would be nice if people would take the initiative. Just simple acts of helping each other." Key

informants also discussed the potential for external support, including institutional action, like proposing projects to the local government, and resource support, such as financial contributions to the sanctuary. Pabing (68, personal interview) suggested:

“The authorities should be the ones to initiate that. For example, the barangay or maybe the LGU of Corella. Once there’s an opportunity for us, the people, to help because we’re invited to participate, we’ll get involved.”

DISCUSSION

The local community had extensive knowledge regarding the Philippine tarsier, including its natural characteristics and factors influenced by human activities, such as cultural and conservation aspects. They acquired their information from formal sources, such as formal education, and informal sources, such as personal or peer-driven knowledge. However, they recognized their knowledge gaps due to barriers such as a lack of education. As a member of the community myself, even if I did not attend the schools in Corella, I can attest to the failure of the school curriculum in educating children about the tarsier. Most of my knowledge about the tarsier prior to conducting this research came from sources similar to those of the respondents, such as the internet and the sanctuary.

Other resources to better inform the community about tarsiers and their conservation included digital sources, such as social media and the internet, as well as physical sources, including books and Corella’s Tarsier Sanctuary. These findings align with multiple existing studies mentioned in the literature review, which posit that cultural beliefs, economic impact, education, and awareness are key factors influencing community perceptions of species (Madhusudan & Mishra, 2003; Salafsky et al., 2001; Jacobson et al., 2006). This reflects that the community is resourceful and open to learning, but constrained by structural and systemic barriers. Their perceptions of tarsiers and their conservation are shaped by accessible knowledge and cultural significance, highlighting the need to provide inclusive and diverse educational resources.

In regards to what they considered to be the biggest threats to tarsier

conservation, the community cited physical threats, such as environmental destruction, and human threats, such as lack of communal support and government limitations, to be what threatened tarsier conservation the most, and that social barriers such as community engagement issues and structural limitations such as the limitations of government involvement posed challenges to addressing these threats. As a resident and living right next to a forest-like area, I have witnessed firsthand the kinds of human activities that are detrimental to the environment, just like the ones discussed by the respondents. Based on their personal experiences, the impact of these threats was impressed upon members of the community because of awareness and knowledge factors, such as being self-aware of the lack of one's awareness and the communal lack of awareness on a broader scale, and the impact of existing institutions, such as the tarsier sanctuary.

My key informants' discussions often circled back to feelings of helplessness when faced with systemic issues despite their recognition of the sanctuary's efforts. These findings align with existing studies that have established sociopolitical factors, economic constraints, and communication gaps as threats to effective conservation efforts (Berkes, 2007; Walpole & Wilder, 2008; Adams et al., 2004; Robinson & Makupa, 2015). This demonstrates that the community understands the threats facing tarsier conservation and recognizes their limitations and systemic issues. Their perceptions are nuanced, informed by lived experiences, and point to a willingness to address these challenges if barriers are reduced. Being both a researcher and a resident, I found this finding both encouraging and disheartening—it shows the community's awareness of the issues. It highlights the systemic barriers that hinder immediate and effective action.

The community also recognized that tarsier conservation was important mainly due to its positive effects on the environment and the community. They also believed that tarsier conservation brought tangible and intangible benefits to the community. Such benefits included the boost of the local economy through tourism. This contrasts with Cañete's (2003) observations, which noted that the local community did not yet perceive tarsiers as providing direct economic benefits. They found the protection of tarsiers significant to the community's culture and the continued welfare of the

environment. The same observations were made by Aure & Ecabi-Ruiz (2005), who projected the tarsier to the mass media as Bohol's mascot.

Drawing from my experience growing up here, I can attest to how deeply the tarsier is woven into the cultural fabric of the community, particularly as a symbol not only of our barangay and town but of the province as a whole, reinforcing these positive views. The community also recognized that the loss of tarsiers in the area, while beneficial to those who perceived the tarsier as a pest, would have a largely negative impact because it would be detrimental to the environment, the economy, and the local culture. This is backed by existing studies by Madhusudan and Mishra (2003) and Salafsky et al. (2001), which posit that factors such as cultural importance and economic benefits tend to shape more positive viewpoints on conservation efforts, and show that the community's perception of tarsier conservation is rooted in a balanced understanding of its costs and benefits. While most see tarsiers as integral to their cultural and ecological identity, the mixed views also highlight the need for tailored conservation strategies that address positive and negative perceptions.

As for the role they believed they played in the conservation of tarsiers, the community believed that they played both a passive and an active role, but that challenges such as awareness and engagement issues, as well as institutional barriers, held them back from participating in conservation efforts. An observation that highlighted the local community's lack of participation in tarsier conservation was made by Aure and Escabi-Ruiz (2005), who stated that the majority of Corella's tarsier conservation initiatives were the responsibility of Carlito "Lito" Pizzaras, a PTFI employee and Corella native. Ultimately, the community endorsed additional initiatives, including community engagement and leveraging external sources for support.

The same recommendations were made by Berkes (2004), who advocated for the empowerment of local stakeholders through community-based conservation programs, and by Jacobson et al. (2007), who emphasized the importance of education and outreach programs in shaping community perceptions and increasing awareness of conservation issues. The absence of concrete initiatives involving active community engagement is a factor previously highlighted by Cañete (2003), which means this

has been an unaddressed barrier for a long time. This means the community is aware of its potential to contribute actively to conservation but feels limited by systemic and institutional challenges. Their perceptions suggest a readiness to engage more meaningfully if provided with the necessary resources, support, and opportunities to overcome these barriers.

CONCLUSION

The Philippine tarsier symbolizes biodiversity and ecological balance, making its conservation a critical endeavor for preserving its species and maintaining healthy ecosystems. Conservation efforts are vital as they safeguard the tarsier's fragile habitats and ensure the survival of this endangered species. However, their success heavily depends on the community's perceptions, knowledge, and active involvement, which can significantly shape the outcomes of these initiatives.

As previous studies have established, these perceptions are shaped by socioeconomic circumstances, cultural significance, scientific understanding, and ecological awareness, all of which can mold personal sentiment into a positive or negative one. The findings of this study indicate that the local community demonstrates a strong foundation of knowledge and awareness regarding tarsier conservation, alongside a readiness to engage more actively if systemic and structural barriers are addressed. By fostering education, improving engagement, and strengthening institutional support, conservation efforts can harness the community's potential to ensure the Philippine tarsier's long-term survival and preserve its ecological, economic, and cultural significance.

In consideration of the findings of this study and the impact of community participation on conservation efforts as established in existing literature, this study recommends that all three stakeholders in Corella's tarsier conservation: the community, the LGU, and the sanctuary, take into consideration the results of this study and formulate ways (or improve on existing ones) to bolster community engagement in tarsier conservation initiatives, especially for the LGU and the sanctuary. For the LGU, it is particularly recommended to encourage community

participation by providing resources and incentives to the local community. At the same time, recommendations for the sanctuary include improving or implementing outreach efforts to foster community engagement. These institutions are encouraged to collaborate to maximize resources and knowledge for community education and tarsier conservation. Meanwhile, the local community should harness local knowledge and cultural ties by actively participating in conservation initiatives spearheaded by the aforementioned institutions or initiating their grassroots movement to support tarsier conservation.

The primary limitation of this study is its scope, which did not encompass the perspectives of the barangay and sanctuary officials regarding the issues investigated. Also, it did not examine how the study participants' socioeconomic backgrounds might influence their perceptions of tarsiers and conservation efforts. Future research is recommended to address these gaps and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors shaping community perspectives and engagement.

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