

# A Moluccan Treasure

Conservation of endangered Indonesian parrots

Text and Photos by Mandy Andrea

Tree houses always invoke such a juvenile sense of glee in me. They are cozy and secretive - a place from which one could look on other people through spy glasses. Now imagine a tree house in the middle of a vast wild rain forest. You could imagine you've become another little member of this untamed world - for a while.

▲ Seram Island as seen from the the Masihulan "tree house" platform. From this bird's eye view, guests can observe birds that fly by or just underneath.

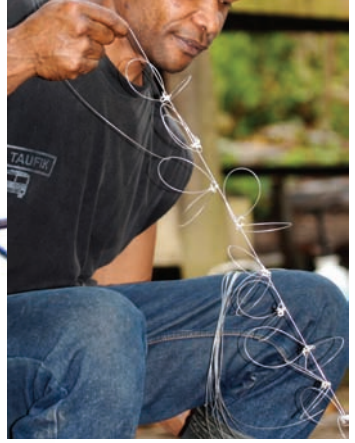


▲ Guests emerge through the jungle canopy at 35 m (115 ft) overlooking a sea of trees and continue skywards to reach the platform.

I have been in such a place. However, instead of spying on people, it was the birds of Seram I was after. Seram is an Indonesian island of the Moluccas, historically known as the "Spice Islands." Much of it still pristine, Seram is part of the rapidly shrinking tropical rain forest that is the other air purifier of our planet. I visited this place as a participant in The Indonesian Parrot Project's (IPP) eco-tour. A highlight of the trip is the trek from the village of Masihulan into a part of this rainforest where clove, nutmeg, coffee and cacao trees still grow wild. Our destination - the IPP platform built 46 m (150ft) up in a majestic ironwood (*Intsia bijuga*) tree. The forest's highest layer consists of emergent trees that tower singly or in small clusters up to 60 m (200ft) in height. The platform is built in the limbs of such a tree.



The Eclectus genus is sexually dimorphic - the females are predominantly red while the males are green.



Soni, an ex-trapper who now works for IPP, demonstrates the fabrication of a trap lined with nooses.



▲ Peering through the dense foliage, we caught glimpses of what appeared to be attempts at nest takeover first by a pair of hornbills, and the next day by a pair of Eclectus.

◀ The female Eclectus, being more aggressive than the male, is the doorkeeper.

*We hear the noisy chattering of Moluccan Red lorries before they appear into view. Just as quickly they disappear, swerving in tight unison through the trees.*



Cockatoos strip the area surrounding the opening bare of bark and plant growth to prevent easy access by predators such as lizards.

*It is not until evening that the much-anticipated call of a Salmon-crested cockatoo reaches us.*

Once heard on many islands of Middle Molucca, and hence their common name, the Moluccan cockatoo, they are now believed to exist in the wild on Seram only.

We hear the call again, this time answered by another in the vicinity. We start to hear the vocalizations of other cockatoos as they take their time making their way to their roosting tree, its top visible from our platform. The first cockatoo emerges, traversing the distance between trees, but is too soon hidden again in the foliage. Minutes later it is followed by another. In twos or threes, ethereally white, eight arrive at the roosting tree as darkness rapidly falls. We too prepare to hunker down for the night high above the forest to rise at the break of dawn to observe the birds begin a new day.

The International Parrot Project aims to conserve and protect the wild parrots of Indonesia. They run a Rehabilitation Center and Sanctuary and work with local communities to protect parrots. IPP has also established programs to instill pride, especially in schoolchildren, in the unique avifauna of their homeland and to develop awareness of the deleterious effects of poaching and provide alternatives.

Mandy Andrea now serves on the Board of Directors for the IPP. For more information visit: [www.indonesian-parrot-project.org](http://www.indonesian-parrot-project.org)



One or two Palm cockatoos visited a katapang (*Terminalia catappa*) tree right in front of our guesthouse on the island of Batanta, West Papua daily.