

# Chasing the 'cendrawasih', or 39 ways to woo your lover

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THE JAKARTA POST

**T**im Laman is a Harvard-trained biologist, but he talked about a lot of numbers at the @america cultural center on Thursday when describing the eight years he spent chasing birds of paradise in Indonesia and Papua New Guinea.

Laman and his partner, Cornell University ornithologist Edwin Scholes III, spent 544 days in the field, racking up 18 expeditions to 51 sites — and 200 trips by plane, 58 by boat and 33 by helicopter.

In the end, Laman, who is also a renowned *National Geographic* wildlife photographer, says that the key number is considerably less: "It's really all about 39 ways to woo your lover."

Laman is the first person to capture on camera live birds of paradise, or *cendrawasih*, from all 39 species, waiting as long as 80 hours in a makeshift shelter to photograph a bird for just 90 seconds.

The famously colorful feathers of the male birds of paradise attract females, who are generally brown and non-descript and build their nests alone. Males are chosen to breed based on their plumage, which has evolved explosively — and gorgeously.

Laman's expeditions, backed by National Geographic and the Cornell Lab for Ornithology, resulted in a book titled *Birds of Paradise: Revealing the World's Most Extraordinary Birds*, published last year.

"There were many [other] expeditions that went to shoot them," Laman said. But those naturalists and explorers shot the birds of paradise dead and took the skins back to museums in Bogor, New York or London. "I was the first to photograph all the species alive."

Laman notes that the only shooting he does is with a bow and arrow — to send climbing ropes to where the birds are atop the rainforest can-

opy 50 meters up. "To really get the right perspective, you need to get up in the trees."

Tree climbing and Indonesian fluency were skills Laman cultivated during field research for his doctorate in Kalimantan in the late 1980s. Meanwhile, Scholes, the only scientist studying live birds of paradise, spoke Melanesian Papuan and knew how to find *cendrawasih* in the rainforest, he adds.

An eye for heights led to a real discovery when looking for the Bronze Parotia bird of paradise in the Foja Mountains in Papua.

The parotia displays on the ground for females who sit on perches overhead. Thinking he might be missing something, Laman built a bamboo ladder and placed a camera above.

On the last day of the trip, Laman hit paydirt: His camera revealed that the parotia displayed previously unexposed blue and yellow feathers on its back to the females above.

No one had observed that before, Laman said. The feathers' use had been a mystery.

The birds are "one of those species that people can get motivated about because they are so beautiful," Laman said, showing a video of a 12-Wired Bird-of-Paradise that used a dozen extremely long and filament-thin feathers extending from his wings to delicately caress a female.

The birds were introduced to Europe by sailors from Magellan's voyage to circumnavigate the globe in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, Laman said. Stopping in Ternate, the expedition captain — Magellan had been speared to death in the Philippines at that point — received a *cendrawasih* skin as a gift from the nearby Sultan of Bacan.

The birds were named after the odd way their skins were prepared, according to Laman: The wings and legs were removed to display their plumage. People in Europe, confused about exactly how wingless birds could fly, thought that the *cen-*



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**Stunning:** Laman says that this shot of a Greater Bird of Paradise taken in the Aru Islands in Papua is among his favorites. "The sun popped out from behind the clouds and I saw the picture I dreamed of happening before me."



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**In the field:** Ed Scholes (left) and Tim Laman pose while waiting to see a bird of paradise in their blind, or temporary shelter.

*drawasih* must float in heaven, calling them the birds of paradise.

Laman says that the most striking image from his trips was taken on Wokan in the Aru Islands, about 100 kilometers southwest of Papua, where the naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace was the first European to see a displaying bird of paradise.

He and Scholes were taken into the rainforest to find their target, the Greater Bird of Paradise, by local residents, who climbed into the mountains to meet them.

About 50 meters up near the birds' display perch, the guides built the scientists an observation post with a floor comprising 12 bamboo

poles — no more or the birds would know.

"I didn't know the birds could count," Laman laughs.

Laman then climbed another tree by the birds' perch, where he hid a remote-controlled camera inside two leaves stitched together by rotten.

The next day, while capturing images of the birds around sunrise as they appeared on the perch to display, Laman said he saw a grand opportunity as a photographer. "The sun popped out from behind the clouds and I saw the picture I dreamed of happening before me."

Laman said he was not too worried about snakes or other animals when in the field. "Part of life in the jungle." More scary, he said, was when Scholes had his appendix burst on a separate expedition in the Papua New Guinea highlands with just two others.

"They didn't have enough help to carry him out," Laman said. "They had a satellite phone and were able to call one of their colleagues in town who was able to arrange for a helicopter — but they did not have a helipad, so the helicopter had to drop axes so they could cut down trees."

Doctors who treated Scholes after he was medevaced to Australia five days later said that the ornithologist had been lucky: The drugs he was taking to fight malaria and giardia likely had kept him alive after the rupture.

Laman is upbeat about the future of the birds of paradise. While three species are endangered in Papua New Guinea, none of the 27 species endemic to Indonesia are, although several are threatened.

Hunting by local communities is not the biggest threat to the birds, although it would be nice if the government could crack down on it, Laman says. Destruction of natural habitats remains the biggest problem.

Laman is also upbeat on the potential for ecotourism to inspire local communities to bring people to see the *cendrawasih* with their own eyes. "People going to watch birds in the forest are not going to disturb the birds too much."

Laman's talk can be viewed at [atamerica.or.id](http://atamerica.or.id) and signed copies of his book with Scholes are available from [timlaman.com](http://timlaman.com).

## DISASTER

# In the Philippines, Cebu fights oil slick from collision

ANN/Philippine Inquirer  
VISAYAS

**C**ebuanos are racing against time to stop the spread of an oil slick that endangers marine life in a coastal municipality on Mactan Island in the Philippines, where the livelihood of 5,000 fishermen is on the line.

Local officials have been appealing for sawdust, coconut husks, feathers, hair, stockings and used clothing that can be used for makeshift oil spill booms to stop the spread of oil from a sunken passenger vessel that went down after being rammed by a cargo ship on Aug. 16.

These materials were identified by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) as environment-friendly oil absorbent.

The appeal didn't fall on deaf ears.

A six-wheel truck delivered sawdust from furniture companies from the Mactan Export Zone to Cordova town, which was worst hit by the oil slick.

The Tuburan municipal government delivered a truckload of coconut husks while private establishments in Barangay Mabolo in Cebu City sent drums and oil absorbent fibers to Cordova, while the Golden Prince Hotel sent 300 used bedsheets and Cebu Private Power Corp. donated absorbent pads, absorbent booms and chemical gloves.

The 1,650 inmates at Cebu Provincial Detention and Rehabilitation Center (CPDRC) even volunteered to have haircuts on Thursday so they could donate their hair to Cordova town.

So far, ABS-CBN has been able to send eight dump trucks full of indigenous materials, mostly human and dog hair, chicken feathers, sawdust and used clothing.

The oil collected will be given to cement plants in Naga City and San Fernando town in southern Cebu and will be used to run their machines.

Passenger vessel MV St. Thomas Aquinas of 2GO, from Agusan del



ANN/Philippine Star

**Ruined:** Oil from the sunken MV St. Thomas Aquinas reaches the shores of Cordova town on Mactan Island, Cebu. The municipality is located in front of Talisay City, where the vessel sank.

Norte, was rammed by cargo ship MV Sulpicio Express Siete of the Philippine Span Asia Carrier Corp. around 9 p.m. on Aug. 16 while entering the Mactan Channel off Lawis Ledge, Talisay City, just 3.2 kilometers from the port.

The Thomas Aquinas sank a few minutes after it was rammed. As of Thursday, 75 bodies have been retrieved while 46 remained missing. More than 500 passengers were rescued.

But, oil started to leak from the sunken ship, which was loaded with 20 tons of diesel oil and 120 tons of bunker oil.

Cebu Governor Hilario Davide III

has declared a state of calamity in the entire province after the oil slick reached 12 of 13 villages in Cordova town and portions of Talisay and Lapu-Lapu cities.

An assessment report showed that 328 hectares of mangroves contracted by nine people' organizations in Cordova town and one in Lapu-Lapu City were destroyed.

Most mangroves were less than a meter tall and had died due to lack of carbon dioxide required during photosynthesis and heat generated by the oil slick.

Three villages in Lapu-Lapu — Calawisan, Babag, and Suba-basbas — were also affected as well as some

beach resorts in the city, which Mactan Island is famous for.

Guests were advised to stay out of the water while resorts used old towels and bed sheets in collecting oil before this reached the shore.

Because of the oil slick, the livelihood of 5,000 fishermen in Cordova was put on the line.

Fisherman Roger Sumagang said he stopped fishing on Aug. 17, a day after the sinking of the Thomas Aquinas because oil covered the catch he had when he tried to fish.

Consumers also refused to buy any sea product — shellfish and fish — after learning that these were caught in the area, he added.



ANN/Philippine Star

**Abandon ship:** Life boats from the St. Thomas Aquinas paddle in front of the Sulpicio Express after their collision.

On regular days, Sumagang said a fisherman could earn a minimum of P200 a day. If they were lucky, he added they could get as much as P1,000 a day.

Sumagang, head of Namasba, said even their fish pen was hit by the oil slick and killed most of the fish that were due for harvest next month.

He said their group lost P330,000 for the 2,000 pieces of grouper that were found floating in the fish pens and P15,000 for the 3,000 pieces of dead rabbitfish.

Namasba has 69 members with more than 100 dependents.

Rodrigo Agasita, Namasba liaison officer, raised fears that with their main source of livelihood gone, they might not be able to feed their children who have to go to school.

Sumagang said they received each an initial kilo of rice on Tuesday but it was barely enough to feed a family with six children.

Cordova Mayor Adelino Sityo told the affected fishermen that they would continue to receive food assistance from the municipality.

Andres Bojos, Bureau of Fisher-

ies and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) director in Central Visayas, said his office had set aside P1.4 million in livelihood assistance for the affected fishermen in Cordova.

He said the livelihood programs would include mangrove potting and planting. The regional BFAR would also provide fuel to fishermen so they could fish in areas not affected by the oil slick.

At least 120 households are seen to benefit from the initial BFAR livelihood assistance.

In the meantime, a massive cleanup drive was launched by local government units, military, police, Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) and concerned citizens to remove the oil slick from Mactan waters.

On Wednesday, some residents, policemen and soldiers installed improvised spill booms.

A team of Japanese salvage experts, also arranged by the firm 2GO, which owns the Thomas Aquinas, arrived on Aug. 20. The team includes technical divers and an expert in salvaging oil from sunken vessels.