



School in Nokopo village.
Photo: ©TKCP

TREE KANGAROO CONSERVATION PROGRAM (TKCP)

Papua New Guinea

Summary

With active participation from villagers in Papua New Guinea (PNG), the Tree Kangaroo Conservation Program (TKCP) aims to create the nation's first protected area designated under PNG's Conservation Area Act of 1978. Encompassing more than 150,000 acres of vital tree kangaroo habitat on the Huon Peninsula, the area is currently being reviewed for formal declaration.

Benefits to People

Communities living in Papua New Guinea's Morobe province struggle to find teachers willing to travel long distances to join a chronically under-funded school system. To help alleviate the villages' teacher shortage, every two years the local community selects three members who are sponsored by the TKCP to attend a teachers college. Following the two-year program, the students then return to teach in the village schools.

The TKCP and landowners are also working together to ensure that forests and wildlife are protected and can benefit the community in sustainable ways both culturally and economically. Drawing on a local tradition of safeguarding sacred lands, the program collaborates with the communities to select "wildlife banks," or critical wildlife areas where hunting is not permitted. However, once community management plans are completed, sustainable hunting will be allowed and managed jointly in other areas.

Villagers are fully committed to the process. They help to identify

and map critical wildlife habitat, document traditional stories and beliefs about tree kangaroos and other native species, and work as research assistants. Some community members have even taken it upon themselves to stop hunting altogether.

An old hunter, named Yawit, from Yawan village revealed that he had once killed hundreds—perhaps thousands—of tree kangaroos in the mountains. "Now we understand why we should stop killing tree kangaroos," says Yawit about the program. "We don't want to kill any more of them. Now we see these animals to appreciate them."

Results

As a result of the program, not only is basic literacy in the participating villages improving, the communities are designing a future that protects their culture as well as the spectacular rain forests and species on which they depend.

Building on this success, activities are underway to create a formal, long-term conservation agreement. Under the agreement, villages that commit land to the Conservation Area will receive long-term support from the TKCP, such as new teachers, health care, and technical assistance with resource management planning.

The program is already expanding. Landowners from neighboring communities have pledged to add their land to



Wild Matschie's tree kangaroos (*Dendrolagus matschiei*).
Photo: ©Tim Laman

the Conservation Area, which has the potential to extend protection and sustainable management to an even larger area.

Biodiversity Importance

Tree kangaroos are charismatic creatures that spend most of their time in tall trees and are only found in Australia and the island of New Guinea. Home to six of 10 species, Papua New Guinea provides tree kangaroos with some of the most pristine rain forest habitat in the world.

The TKCP focuses on the Matschie's tree kangaroo (*Dendrolagus matschiei*), which is classified as Endangered under the authoritative World Conservation Union (IUCN)'s Red List of Threatened Species.

The Matschie tree kangaroo is only found on the Huon Peninsula, a biologically-rich environment containing coral reefs, rain forests, and sub alpine grasslands. Faced with several threats, the Matschie is hunted for meat and fur and its habitat is under threat by mining, logging and agricultural development in the region.

As the only "reef to ridges" protected area in PNG, the proposed tree kangaroo reserve will encompass an amazing diversity of habitats and species, including the Endangered long-beaked echidna, birds of paradise, frogs, butterflies and hundreds of species of coral and reef fishes.

At a Glance

Conservation International has provided funding for the TKCP since 2002 through its Global Conservation Fund and now aims to establish it as the first endowed conservation program in PNG. The Tree Kangaroo Conservation Program was founded in 1996 by Dr. Lisa Dabek, Director of Conservation at the Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle, Washington, USA.

What is a Conservation Agreement?

Conservation agreements provide communities with benefits and capacity-building in exchange for their participation in effective conservation of high priority areas and species. Key strengths of this approach are an explicit agreement linking benefits to conservation, the ability to tailor development support to each specific circumstance, and concrete conservation results.

Where the Money Goes

Contributions of any size make a huge difference.

The following are examples of how an endowment fund will support the community:

- \$100 One healthcare worker to attend training workshop
- \$400 A radio collar for one tree kangaroo for one season
- \$500 Education supplies for village schools for one year
- \$1000 One student at the Balob Teachers School for one year (two-year degree followed by six-year commitment at village schools)
- \$2500 Education workshop for village teachers
- \$5000 One year's salary for the Community Conservation Coordinator
- \$7000 One solar refrigerator for a village Aid Post (medical supply/vaccine storage)



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