Hunting with various types of traps as a local threat to the Bangon Monitor Lizard (*Varanus bangonorum*) from Mindoro Island, Philippines

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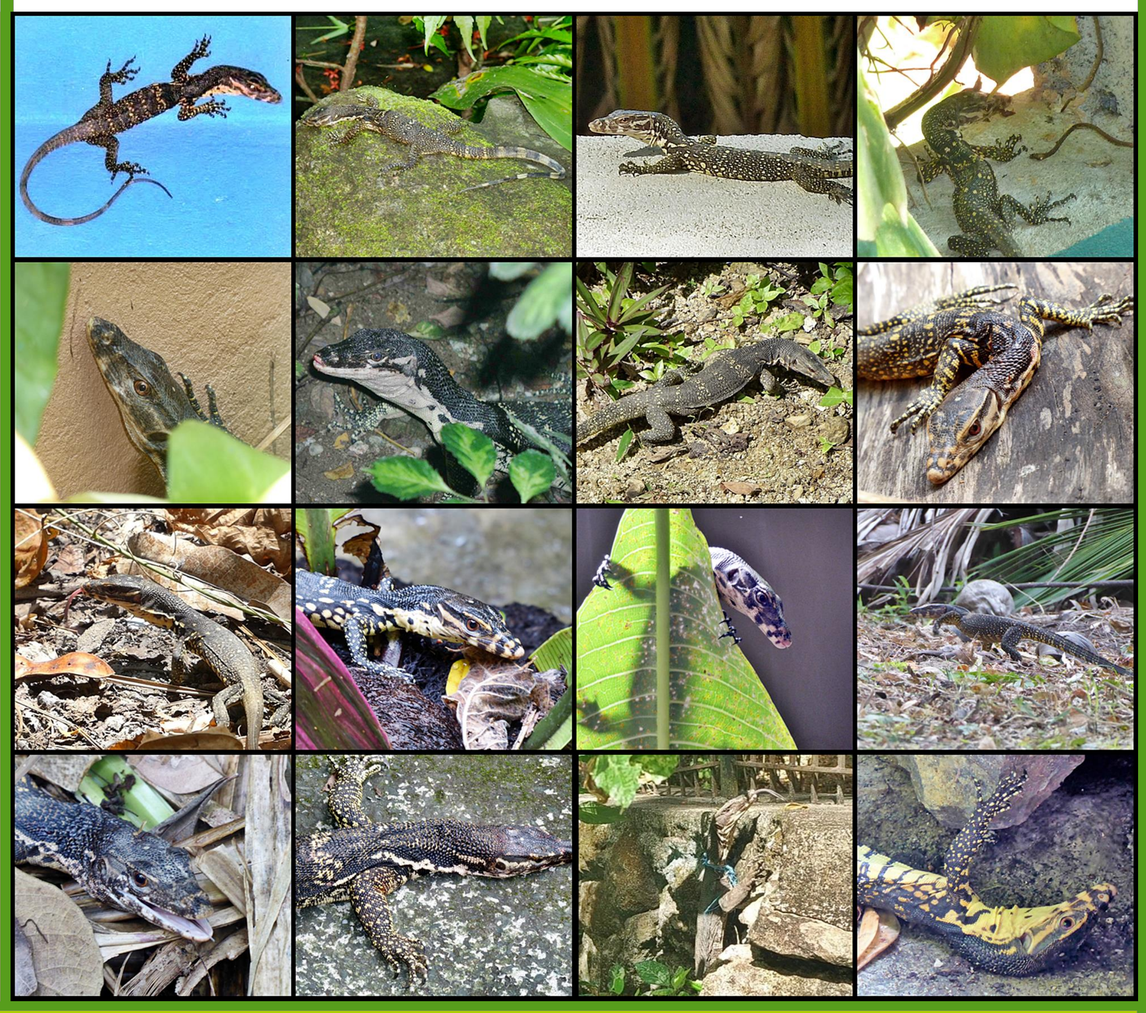

INTRODUCTION

The Bangon Monitor Lizard (*Varanus bangonorum*, "Bayawak" in Tagalog and most local dialects), photo on the right, is one of **eleven varanid species endemic** to the Philippines; their occurrence is restricted to dwindling habitats on the islands of Mindoro and Semirara.

Since it is a poorly known species, its current status on the **IUCN red list** is NE - **not evaluated**. However, its CITES status is included in Appendix II/B. In the Philippines, it is listed in Cat. D "OTS" (Other Threatened Species) in DENR-AO 2019-09. According to a 30-year study (1989-2018) based on CITES trade data and examining online offers made by various groups and accounts via social media (e.g. Facebook), **no online trade** was identified from Mindoro Island.

OBSERVATION AREA

The total observation area (locally known as "Munting Buhangin") consists of 14.52 ha, the photo on the left. There is no direct road access, so no motorized traffic in this area. **To protect the natural environment** with its wildlife, trespassing and harmful activities including **all forms of hunting**, plant/fruit harvesting, littering, forest exploitation, and kaingin (slash and burn) **are prohibited** and monitored within the limits of "Munting Buhangin".

THE VARIOUS TYPES OF TRAPS

As elsewhere in the Philippines, the indigenous people of this area (Iraya-Mangyan) also regard the monitor lizards (as well as other wild animals) as an additional free **meat source**. Residents also consider the lizard a **predator**. Reports include sightings of these reptiles sneaking into villages to grab young chickens and/or steal eggs. **The Illegal hunting** of the Bangon Monitor Lizard is seasonal (during summer months) and done by setting different kinds of simple, yet very effective traps hidden within leaf-littered grounds. The **three most common traps** are:

Figure A. neck sling using bait.
Figure B. foot snare (without bait).
Figure C. head snare using no. 4 PVC pipe with bait.

The hunting methods presented here have lasted for decades without verification, without controls. They are, at least for the natives, **integrated into their way of life**. Depending on location and positioning, empty traps can be difficult to detect by the untrained eye unless the rope used as a snare is brightly colored. In 2022, we managed to **destroy more than thirty different traps** (Figure D).

TO ACT

The people living in these remote locations need to be made aware of **the importance of protecting local wildlife species** and their habitats by receiving easily understandable information. Distributing posters/flyers with **pictures of protected species** under their local names can help overcome illiteracy issues as it is insufficient to circulate wildlife crime regulations and their penalties if people can't read them.

Another possible solution could be to actively involve local people in a long-term 'Project Bayawak', similar to 'Pawikan Patrol' - a sea turtle conservation project. This would gradually increase awareness aimed at **protecting these lizards** instead of exploiting them. Local knowledge could also serve as a valuable resource in contributing to future research projects.

CONCLUSION

The problem of hunting monitor lizards is known in many countries, for example, *Varanus niloticus* in Africa is caught for meat and sale (Figure E).

Our conclusion: deliberate hunting by setting traps is one of **the major threats in this area**, especially since most of the animals captured seem to be young specimens.

Given the observations presented here, we strongly encourage conservationists to pay **more attention to the threats to this species**.

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