

MANGROVE-BASED INITIATIVES FOR THRIVING HABITATS AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

MIDYEAR REPORT 2025

OCEANUS CONSERVATION

SECURITY BANK

COMMUNITIES + NATURE

Project MITHI Planting Site
Dulao Village, Aringay, La Union
Photo by Camille Rivera | Oceanus Conservation
Circa February 2025

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SUPPORT FOR BAIS BANTAY DAGAT

YELLOW-VENTED BULBUL
Pycnonotus goiavier
Least Concern (IUCN Red List)

Photo by Sharlene Mercado | Oceanus Conservation
Spotted during Wildlife Research in Talabong Mangrove Reserve, Bais City, Negros Oriental

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Mangrove-based Initiatives for Thriving Habitats and Inclusive Communities

This project outlines a collaborative effort between Oceanus Conservation, Communities for Nature, and Security Bank to achieve ecosystem regeneration and community development in three key localities: two municipalities in **La Union** and one city in **Southern Negros**.

PROJECT GOALS

1. Restore and protect mangrove ecosystems by rehabilitating unproductive fishponds
2. Enable communities through **community-led** mangrove and wildlife **ecotourism** and **conservation**.
3. **Educate** and inspire communities to protect, conserve and regenerate ecosystems through **immersive learning** and **climate solutions workshops**, and **citizen science**.
4. **Foster sustainable livelihoods and enterprises** in collaboration with communities for a secure future.



PROJECT SITES



Why Bais?

- The **Tañon Strait Protected Seascape (TSPS)** is the largest marine protected area under the **National Integrated Protected Areas System (NIPAS-MPA)*** in the Philippines, spanning **534,589.04 hectares.**
- **Bais City** stands out in this vast seascape for its **ongoing conservation efforts**, including active **Bantay Dagat operations** and **long-standing collaborations** with various stakeholders.
- However, there are significant challenges, including **insufficient financing for monitoring efforts** and **wildlife assessments** in the mangrove area.
- To alleviate pressure on mangroves and fisheries, there is a pressing need for **diversifying income**.

Why Aringay?

- Oceanus Conservation has maintained a **strong partnership** with the community **since 2021**, working together on mangrove restoration and fisheries sustainability.
- The area is **vulnerable to natural hazards**, having experienced major events like the **1991 earthquake** and **recurring typhoons**, highlighting the need for increased climate resilience.
- There is a **focus on mangrove restoration and fisheries sustainability**
- **Established partnerships** aim to prolong relationships within the community
- Due to **annual typhoon paths**, the area **needs community and climate resilience**
- Additionally, **alternative livelihoods are required to reduce pressure on mangroves and fisheries**

***NIPAS-MPA** - A Marine Protected Area (MPA) under the National Integrated Protected Areas System (NIPAS) is a legally designated marine zone in the Philippines managed for biodiversity conservation and sustainable use.*

PROJECT COLLABORATORS



SECURITY BANK

Established in 1951, Security Bank is one of the Philippines' leading universal banks and is publicly listed with the Philippine Stock Exchange (PSE:SECB) in 1995. The Bank's core businesses are retail, corporate, commercial, and business (MSME) banking, offering a wide range of services including lending, leasing, foreign exchange, stock brokerage, investment banking, and asset management

For more information, visit www.securitybank.com.

COMMUNITIES FOR NATURE

Communities for Nature (CfN) is a UK-based charity that matches forward-thinking corporate supporters with communities at the frontline of conservation. They deliver environmental and community development programs that create a sustainable future for all.

For more information, visit www.communitiesfornature.org

OCEANUS CONSERVATION

A science-based non-profit environmental organization focusing on the conservation and restoration of blue carbon habitats in the Philippines.

For more information, visit www.oceanusconservation.org

COMMUNITY PARTNERS



Bais City, Negros Oriental

Fisherfolks Association of Capiñahan **Bantay Dagat of Bais City**

Year Established: **2016**
Barangay: **Capiñahan**
City Population: **84,317 (2020)**
Number of households: **20,047**
Common Source of Income of Members: **Fisherfolk, Gleaning, Bantay Dagat (Job Order by LGU), Homestay operations**
Potential Areas for Collaboration: **Development of Talabong Island into BDFE (e.g. Bamboo Boardwalks)**



Aringay, La Union

Dulao Fishpond and Fishpen Producers Cooperative

Year Established: **2019**
Barangay: **Dulao**
Municipality Population: **55,766 (2022)**
Number of households: **11,891**
Common Source of Income of Members: **Fishpen caretaker, Fish vendor, Tobacco Farmer, Fishing**
Potential Areas for Collaboration: **Facility for livelihood, Bamboo bridge**



“Tikarol”
COLLARED KINGFISHER
Todiramphus chloris
Least Concern (IUCN Red List)

Photo by Sharlene Mercado | Oceanus Conservation
Spotted during Wildlife Research in Talabong Mangrove Reserve, Bais City, Negros Oriental

PROJECT MITHI MIDYEAR REPORT 2025

PROJECT TIMELINE

JANUARY

- **Project Launching** at Security Bank Office, Makati City
- **Project site visits at Aringay, La Union and Bais City, Negros Oriental** with Oceanus Conservation and Communities for Nature and partner communities



FEBRUARY

- **Planted 700 saplings and created 40 mounds** in the restoration site as of February
- **Engaged with 10 locals and community members** for the mangrove planting and monitoring activity
- **Press Feature**
  - Business Daily: **Project MITHI launched to protect, regenerate mangrove ecosystems**
  - InsiderPH: **Security Bank's 'Project MITHI' champions coastal community resilience, wildlife conservation**



MARCH

- **Planted 2,500 mangrove saplings** as of March
- **Wildlife Research** was conducted at **Talabong Mangrove Reserve in Bais City, Negros Oriental**
- **Engaged ten (10) Foundation University students** in Wildlife Field-based Research



APRIL

- For the month of April, there are **520 mangrove saplings planted**
- **Coordination with community partners** in Bais City for the **development of IEC materials**
- **Gathered baseline data on 125 mounds** for the survival rate of the mangroves planted
- **Monitoring of the first batch of planting,** after one (1) month



MAY

- **Forty-three (43) Security Bank employees volunteered** and planted **940 mangrove saplings**
- Planted a total of **5,000 native mangrove saplings in Aringay, La Union**
- **One-day Forum** with **41 participants** at Bais City, Negros Oriental
- **Provided equipment for Bantay Dagat** of Bais City



JUNE

- Baseline monitoring for **2nd batch**
- Overall survivability rate as of June 2025 is **88.82%**
- Planting of the **3rd batch of seedlings** (ongoing)



PROJECT MITHI MIDYEAR REPORT 2025

PROJECT ROADMAP

JANUARY-DECEMBER 2025





LAUNCHING MITHI: GROWING RESILIENCE FROM THE ROOTS UP

This year, on January 22, 2025, Security Bank Corporation, in partnership with Oceanus Conservation and Communities for Nature, officially launched Project MITHI: Mangrove-based Initiatives for Thriving Habitats and Inclusive Communities. This forward-looking collaboration aims to rehabilitate mangrove ecosystems, conduct wildlife research, and build local capacity for conservation in its inaugural sites—two municipalities in La Union and one city in Southern Negros.

"Project MITHI is more than just an environmental program. It's also a collaborative partnership to empower and enable communities to become active stakeholders in conservation through habitat restoration and the promotion of tourism and other livelihood opportunities." said Nikki Lizares, Vice President and Sustainability Head of Security Bank.

Gracing the launch were key leaders from each organization, including Mr. Eduardo M. Olbes of Security Bank, Ms. Rhoda Phillips of Communities for Nature, and Ms. Camille Rivera of Oceanus Conservation, alongside LGU representatives and a community voice from Aringay. The event marked a united commitment to sustainability, people, and place.

Following the launch, project partners visited communities in Aringay and Bais City to meet with local stakeholders, build trust, and lay the groundwork for community-led conservation. MITHI not only promises healthier mangrove forests—it envisions empowered communities and a more resilient future for our coasts.













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The beginning of mangrove rehabilitation in Aringay, La Union. Circa February 2025

RESTORING NATURE, EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES

Project MITHI's mangrove rehabilitation initiative in Aringay, La Union has made meaningful strides. To date, we've **planted 5,700 native mangrove seedlings**, a vital step toward strengthening coastal resilience and enhancing carbon sequestration—equivalent to **70,110 kg of carbon dioxide or equivalent to offsetting 15 cars' carbon emission per year*** in long-term carbon storage.

The species planted—*Rhizophora spp.*, *Lumnitzera spp.*, and *Avicennia spp.*—were selected based on site-specific zoning and the naturally occurring flora of the area. This thoughtful approach ensures ecological harmony and maximizes the chances of survival and growth.

We also conducted comprehensive baseline biodiversity assessments, focusing on macroinvertebrates and the habitats of both migratory and resident bird species. These data guided our planting strategy, identifying zones where mangrove restoration would be beneficial and areas that must remain untouched to preserve critical foraging grounds. This minimizes disturbance to the natural habitat and supports ongoing ecological balance.

Beyond the environmental gains, this effort has also contributed to local livelihoods. Our partner community, the Dulao Fishpond and Fishpen Producers Cooperative, has earned additional income through their involvement in mounding, planting, and monitoring activities. The project not only restores back ecosystems—it uplifts communities from diversifying income.



PLANTED
4
native mangrove species

PLANTED
5700
native mangrove seedlings

IDENTIFIED
24
bird species

1
ENDANGERED bird species

1
VULNERABLE bird species







*Calculation Source: https://www.moretrees.eco/blogs/how-much-carbon-does-a-tree-absorb

Photo by Vic Yumol | Oceanus Conservation



"Talabong"
CHINESE EGRET
Egretta eulophotes
Vulnerable (IUCN Red List)

Photo by Sharlene Mercado | Oceanus Conservation
Spotted during Wildlife Research in Talabong Mangrove Reserve, Bais City, Negros Oriental



SECURITY BANK PLANTS SEEDS OF RESILIENCE THROUGH PROJECT MITHI

In celebration of the Month of the Ocean, Security Bank, together with Oceanus Conservation and Communities for Nature, planted **940 native mangrove seedlings** alongside the Dulao Fishpond and Fishpen Producers Cooperative.

The restoration activity united **43 bank volunteers** from nine branches with LGU officials and local leaders in Aringay, La Union.Biodiversity and sustainability were front and center, with three native mangrove species planted to strengthen coastal resilience.

Beyond ecological restoration, the effort supported local livelihoods, with the cooperative playing a key role in planting and monitoring. Inspired by the experience, one bank employee even expressed plans to revive mangrove planting in her hometown.

Project MITHI is more than tree planting—it's a community-centered movement growing habitats, opportunities, and a legacy of shared stewardship.













THRIVING TOGETHER: COMMUNITY AND CONSERVATION IN MANGROVE MONITORING

Mangrove rehabilitation doesn't end with planting. In fact, the true measure of success begins after the seedlings take root. **Monitoring is the critical bridge** between initial efforts and lasting impact—**ensuring seedlings not only survive but flourish**.

Through consistent and structured monitoring, we gain valuable insights into survival rates, growth trends, species performance, and the ecological shifts in the area. These data guide adaptive management and improve the effectiveness of future interventions.





COMPLETED

270

mangrove mounds

MANGROVE SEEDLINGS SURVIVAL RATE

89%

as of June 2025

Beyond ecological value, monitoring also supports local livelihoods. For our partner community—the Dulao Fishpond and Fishpen Producers Cooperative—ongoing monitoring has become a source of additional income through their direct involvement in site observation and maintenance.

The mangrove planting efforts have achieved an impressive **89% survival rate**, significantly **exceeding the national average of just 20%** for planted mangroves in the Philippines.* This rate also surpasses our internal success threshold of 70%, **reflecting the effectiveness of the science-based site selection, community engagement, and post-planting monitoring strategies.**

Ultimately, mangrove monitoring is more than a technical necessity—it's a long-term commitment. It shows us whether our **seedlings are evolving into carbon sinks, wildlife habitats, and coastal protectors**. Most importantly, it reinforces our shared responsibility to nurture what we've started—both for nature and for the communities who care for it.

*Source: Primavera, Jurgenne & Esteban, J.. (2008). A review of mangrove rehabilitation in the Philippines: Successes, failures and future prospects. Wetlands Ecology and Management. 16. 345-358. 10.1007/s11273-008-9101-y.

Bird foraging activity observed—this area was intentionally excluded from mangrove planting to avoid disturbance.

Photo by Sharlene Mercado | Oceanus Conservation
Spotted at Dulao fishpond in Aringay, La Union

WILDLIFE RESEARCH

From March 27 to 30, Oceanus Conservation conducted a four-day wildlife research activity in Talabong Island, Bais City, in partnership with Foundation University and the Bantay Dagat unit of the City Agriculturist's Office. This effort builds on a previous mangrove and bird conservation initiative by expanding the focus to broader biodiversity.

Led by student researchers from Foundation University and supported by wildlife experts and Bantay Dagat volunteers, the activity aimed to gather baseline biodiversity data.

The wildlife research conducted in Talabong Island marks the **first comprehensive study** of its kind in the area, providing critical baseline data on bird populations, habitat conditions, and species presence. This research serves as a **foundation for long-term conservation planning** and strengthens the scientific basis for protecting Talabong Island's rich biodiversity.

These findings will help strengthen the island's protection and serve as a scientific foundation for future conservation and community initiatives by the local government.













INITIAL FINDINGS: FLORA & FAUNA

7 mangrove species

2 associated plants

1 non-volant mammalian fauna

3 volant* mammalian fauna

1 amphibian species

9 reptiles

12 migrant avifauna species

11 resident avifauna species

6 endemic avifauna species

***Volant (birds)** – Refers to bird species that are capable of flight, as opposed to flightless birds.







PHILIPPINE DUCK
Anas luzonica
Vulnerable (IUCN Red List)

Photo by Sharlene Mercado | Oceanus Conservation
Spotted during Wildlife Research in Talabong Mangrove Reserve, Bais City, Negros Oriental













ONE-DAY FORUM

On May 30, Project MITHI convened a one-day forum in Bais City to rally stakeholders around the protection of Talabong Island. The event marked a meaningful step toward sustainable conservation and community collaboration.

The forum **featured a presentation of baseline wildlife data** from recent research on the island, laying the groundwork for evidence-based protection strategies. **Essential equipment and IEC materials** were also turned over to the City Agriculture Office and Bantay Dagat team to strengthen their ongoing conservation work.

Ms Daisy Gesim, Bais City Agriculture Officer, shared: "*This project is great! We need to institutionalize these developments. We've started with small steps today, but they will grow into something big. Soon, we will be recognized for the richness of our biodiversity—especially our Talabong Mangrove Reserve.*"

Representatives from local government, schools, and partner communities joined forces to discuss how to build a shared, sustainable future for Talabong Island. With active support from the Bais City LGU and its partners, Project MITHI continues to turn collective commitment into concrete action.























Mockup photo of the IEC material produced.



Equipping Bais City's Sea Patrols: Strengthening Bantay Dagat for a Safer, Protected Talabong

In a bold move to bolster marine protection efforts, Project MITHI provided vital equipment to the Bantay Dagat unit under the Bais City Agriculture Office, led by Ms. Daisy Gesim. These community enforcers are at the frontline of safeguarding Talabong Mangrove Reserve and the broader Tañon Strait—battling illegal fishing, poaching, and mangrove cutting while also responding to emergencies at sea.

The support package included dolphin and human stretchers, floodlights, flashlights, ponchos, and other essential field equipment to enhance their monitoring and search-and-rescue operations, especially during critical nighttime and extreme weather conditions.

To amplify awareness and prevention, the Bantay Dagat team also received information, education, and communication materials—a tarpaulin featuring common illegally captured marine species and a clear warning of legal prohibitions.

Ms Daisy Gesim, Senior Aquaculturist and Officer-in-charge of the Bais City Agriculture Office shared, "*We have been wanting to have this IEC materials for the longest time. Because there has been many illegal capture of marine species, especially the pagi/manta rays and sharks. This has been a great help for us.*"

This initiative was deeply inspired by the unwavering dedication and sacrifices of the Bantay Dagat team. Their vigilance has kept Talabong's ecosystems intact and its communities safe. Empowering them with the right tools is not just an act of support—it's an investment in justice, resilience, and shared responsibility for our coastal heritage.

As we reach the halfway mark of Project MITHI's first year, we, from **Oceanus Conservation**, are deeply grateful to our partners, **Security Bank Corporation, Communities for Nature**, and our partner communities in **Aringay and Bais City**, who continue to bring life and meaning to our vision of resilient futures, thriving habitats, and inclusive development.

In the coming months, we will strengthen our work in mangroves and migratory bird conservation, deepen our support for **local governance and community co-management, and expand youth and women's participation in conservation**. We look forward to more shared learning, storytelling, and action through inclusive dialogues.

At the heart of Project MITHI are the communities who protect, restore, and care for our coastal habitats—not only for today, but for generations to come. It is with gratitude and hope that we move forward, together.



"Kalamag"
Rusty-breasted Cuckoo
Cacomantis sepulcralis

Photo by Sharlene Mercado | Oceanus Conservation
Spotted during Wildlife Research in Talabong Mangrove Reserve, Bais City, Negros Oriental

PROJECT MITHI MIDYEAR REPORT 2025

A RESILIENT FUTURES PROJECT

MITHI
MANGROVE-BASED INITIATIVES FOR THRIVING HABITATS AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

INITIATED BY

OCEANUS CONSERVATION
SECURITY BANK
COMMUNITIES for NATURE

IN COLLABORATION WITH

Bais City Government Unit through **Mayor Luigi Goñi**
Bais City Agriculture Office through **Ms Daisy Gesim**
Bais City Bantay Dagat through **Mr Lito Torres**
Fisherfolk Association of Capiñahan **Mr Dominador Esona**

Municipal Government Unit of Aringay, La Union through **Mayor Benjamin Sibuma**
Aringay Agriculture Office through **Ms Behilda Miana**
Dulao Fishpond and Fishpen Producers Cooperative through **Ms Delilah Lacadue**

SPECIAL THANKS TO

Foundation University
Bahia de Bais
Security Bank - Sustainability Department

MITHI

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