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Tourism poses serious threat on land crab population in Siargao

By ROEL CATOTO

GENERAL LUNA, Siargao Island — Amid a fast changing landscape, and the continued influx of tourists attracted by ideal surfing conditions here, the population of land crabs has declined in recent months.

Bernardo Alciso, 54, a local land crab hunter, said the ongoing decline poses a serious threat not just on his livelihood, but the island's delicate ecosystem.

Alciso lives in the world renowned village of Catangnan, where Cloud Nine, the surfing capital of the country is located.

Also known as "Dayong," Alciso is one of several known hunters of land crabs, locally known as "kayabang."

Alciso, 54, has been hunting these edible land crabs in Catangnan as a livelihood since he was nine years old.

"When I was teenager, one tambak trap can get as many as 50 land crabs or more," Alciso said in Siargaonon. "But now, it's hard to get that number as the landscape of the town has tremendously changed due to the influx of tourists."

"It's obvious that the town has changed so fast, from the town center to Catangnan there's a lot of houses and resorts being built unlike before when that's virtually full of trees and vegetation," he lamented.

He lamented that he can now harvest only half a bucket of land crab these days when he used to collect a sack only a few years ago.

The drastic decrease in land crab population is not only taking its toll

on Alciso's livelihood, but may also have a negative effect on the coastal ecosystem.

A research synthesis published in Biological Reviews in 2009 showed land crabs as among the most important creatures affecting tropical forest growth along coasts, on islands and in mangroves.

Dr. Erin Lindquist, professor at Meredith College and co-author of the

published synthesis said if land crabs were removed from these coastal ecosystems, soil nutrient levels may decrease due to the decreased rates of litter decomposition (land crabs move leaf litter into their burrows thereby increasing litter decomposition and increasing nutrient return to the soil) which in turn, may limit plant growth," according to the published study.

* TOURISM