



# Marine Conservation Institute

## Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park Ranger Team Earns International Ranger Award

By [Marine Conservation Institute](#) | July 26, 2023



Award winning Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park Rangers: Cresencio Caranay Jr., Segundo Conales Jr., Jeffrey David, and Noel Bundal at the Tubbataha Reefs ranger station. Photo: Jon Andrew Cabiles

*Blue Park Rangers Recognized for Extraordinary Commitment to Marine Conservation*

PRESS RELEASE

Press Kit (photos, captions): <https://marine-conservation.box.com/s/6vl1nj4xff8v8qnvv3dmvslf4i57sy8i>

[26 July 2023] – Today, at a ceremony broadcast across the globe, a team of rangers from Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park (a [2017 Blue Park](#)) in the Philippines earned the [IUCN WCPA International Ranger Award](#). Hosted by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas, in collaboration with the International Ranger Federation, Re:wild, Conservation Allies, Universal Ranger Support Alliance, IUCN US and WWF Tigers Alive Initiative, these awards honor individuals and teams that have demonstrated exceptional personal commitment and valor in the face of serious threats to safeguard a protected area. Four Tubbataha Management Office rangers, Segundo Conales Jr., Noel Bundal, Jeffrey David, and Cresencio Caranay Jr., were recognized with the award, which is accompanied by a cash prize of US \$10,000 to support the conservation work of their organization.



“This award belongs to all the men from the Philippine Navy, the Philippine Coast Guard, and the Municipality of Cagayancillo who work with us to safeguard our country’s marine biodiversity,” said award winner, Jeffrey David. “I am so proud because even if we are isolated for most of the year in the middle of the Sulu Sea, we are not unseen and unappreciated; the international community recognizes our contributions to nature conservation.”

## Tubbataha Reefs IUCN Rangers Award 2023



Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park is a 970 km<sup>2</sup> no-take marine protected area that surrounds two remote, uninhabited coral atolls. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, it includes thriving coral reefs that have exhibited resilience to climate change, as well as at least 181 threatened or endangered species. Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park meets the highest scientific standards of conservation effectiveness which earned it a [Blue Park Award](#) in 2017. Its strong protection and effective, adaptive management have generated tangible conservation benefits, including increased fish biomass, abundant indicator species, and higher coral recruitment than other similar but unprotected areas.

These accomplishments would not have been possible without its dedicated, knowledgeable ranger team. Stationed on a remote, otherwise uninhabited atoll, Conales, Bundal, David, and Caranay form the core of the Tubbataha ranger team. They lead Tubbataha Reefs’ assigned rangers from the Philippine Navy, Philippine Coast Guard, and the local government of Cagayancillo, rotating duty every two months and spending half of each year living at the remote ranger station and safeguarding Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park. The rangers are responsible for enforcement and surveillance, both day and night, which can be dangerous due to weather, sea conditions, and illegal fishers. Their diligence and persistence, alongside their community outreach in Cagayancillo, have led to a steep decline in illegal activities in the park and have saved countless fish, turtles, and other wildlife.

Angelique M. Songco, the Protected Area Superintendent fondly known as ‘Mama Ranger,’ expressed her pride for the team: “I am so keenly aware of the personal sacrifices of the men who safeguard the Tubbataha Reefs, who are away from family and friends for long periods of time, missing birthdays, graduations, burials, and other significant occasions. To be recognized for their efforts makes all their hardships worthwhile. I am so proud of the marine park rangers of Tubbataha! *Mabuhay kayo!* (Long live!)”

According to Songco, the rangers are known among local communities for treating offenders with respect and participating in a government restorative justice program. They offer exceptional hospitality to tourists during rough seas, offering supplies and acting as snorkeling guides. The rangers also collect ecological data to inform conservation management decisions and communicate the importance of protecting Tubbataha Reefs through educational outreach initiatives that have increased local support for the protected area.





Blue Park Ambassador, Clément Pourtal (center), creates documentaries to highlight outstanding marine conservation projects, and he joined the ranger team at Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park to document their protection of the incredible biodiversity found there. The new documentary, *The Blue Quest Palawan*, will be available for free by the end of the year. From left: Rangers Crecensio Caranay Jr., Segundo Conales Jr., Noel Bundal, Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park Superintendent Angelique Songco, Blue Parks Ambassador Clément Pourtal, three enforcement officers on rotation in Tubbataha Reefs, and Ranger Jeffrey David. Photo: *The Blue Quest* (@thebluequest, <http://www.thebluequest.com/en/home/>)

“The Blue Parks team at Marine Conservation Institute is excited and proud to shine a light on Tubbataha Reefs rangers’ commitment to safeguarding marine wildlife,” said Dr. Sarah Hameed, Director of Blue Parks and Senior Scientist at Marine Conservation Institute. “We nominated these rangers for the International Ranger Award because we know what an important role they play in making Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park the exemplary Blue Park that it is.”

A ranger from another awarded Blue Park, [Parque Nacional Marinho Dos Abrolhos](#) in Brazil, also earned an IUCN WCPA International Ranger Award for inspirational service to marine protected area management. Maria Bernadete Silva Barbosa has dedicated 35 years of service to protecting, patrolling, and monitoring the unique coral reefs ecosystems of Abrolhos. Through her communication with the local community, stakeholders, and visitors, she has inspired respect for the Park and its wildlife and earned national and international acclaim. Of nine International Ranger awardees this year, the rangers from Tubbataha and Abrolhos were the only ones stationed at marine protected areas.

You can watch the recording of the IUCN WCPA International Ranger Award ceremony on the [IUCN Protected Areas Facebook](#).



International Ranger Award Winner, Maria Bernadete Silva Barbosa, from Parque Nacional Marinho dos Abrolhos in Brazil. Photo: Josângela Jesus

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