



Original Research Paper

From Fascination to Safeguarding: A Discourse Analysis of Competing Narratives on Hunting and Conserving the Philippine Eagle

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Abstract

Competing views about recreational hunting and wildlife conservation are common today. The pro-hunting view sees hunting as a regulated activity that can make use of natural resources, while the anti-hunting view focuses on animal welfare, ethical concerns, and changing attitudes toward wildlife. This study addressed the need for examining the competing views surrounding the hunting and conservation of the Philippine Eagle to understand how these views influence conservation practices. There were 18 participants from Mindanao, Philippines, who were familiar with social media and had some exposure to online discussions and conversations about Philippine Eagle conservation. They were provided with snippets of social media comments that describes hunting and conservation of the Philippine eagle. The findings revealed that hunting was a possible source of livelihood or financial gain, particularly because conservation rewards could unintentionally encourage people to capture eagles for money. However, some raised moral concerns, viewing the killing of the Philippine Eagle for entertainment or personal satisfaction as wrong and emphasizing the species' right to survive. Some comments reflected a view of human superiority, where human needs and interests were considered more important than the protection of wildlife. These competing views could make Philippine Eagle conservation more difficult because they reflected different beliefs about human-wildlife relationships, economic needs, cultural practices, and responsibility for protecting wildlife. Nevertheless, the study suggested that protecting the Philippine Eagle, including other species, requires more than laws and financial rewards. It needed clear regulations, stronger enforcement, better public understanding, scientific guidance, and active involvement from local communities and other stakeholders.

Keywords: illegal wildlife trade, Philippine eagle, recreational hunting, wildlife conservation

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Introduction

The Philippine Eagle (*Pithecophaga jefferyi*) is a unique tropical forest bird of prey and one of the most threatened birds in the world (McClure et al., 2023). It is currently listed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List (Sutton et al., 2025). The species is found only in the Philippines, particularly on Mindanao, Leyte, Samar, and Luzon, although its population is now scattered across mostly mountain forests and some lowland dipterocarp forests (Sutton et al., 2023). Over the past 50 years, its population has dropped sharply, mainly because of deforestation and the loss of its forest habitat, as well as hunting and other forms of persecution (Sutton et al., 2023; Sutton et al., 2025).

This study addressed the need for an effective conservation mechanism for the Philippine Eagle by examining the competing narratives surrounding its hunting and conservation. Specifically, it identified the different contexts in which these narratives emerged and how they shaped perspectives and practices related to Philippine Eagle conservation.

Competing narratives for recreational hunting and wildlife conservation are present in modern world. The pro-hunting narrative viewed hunting as a regulated use of renewable natural resources that could support wildlife management, ecosystem conservation, and local economic and cultural interests when it was guided by scientific evidence, sustainable practices, and adaptive management (Carpio et al., 2024). In contrast, the anti-hunting narrative emphasized animal welfare, ethical concerns, and changing social values, particularly as increasingly urban societies developed greater empathy toward animals and stronger opposition to animal killing (Rodríguez-Estival et al., 2025). The debate centered on whether hunting should be viewed primarily as a threat to wildlife or as a potential conservation tool, with the literature suggesting that its acceptability depended largely on sustainability, scientific management, social acceptance, and consideration of animal welfare (Di Minin et al., 2021; Linares et al., 2025).

Illegal wildlife trade is a major and profitable problem in the Philippines and across Southeast Asia. The Philippines is especially vulnerable because of its high biodiversity, large number of endemic species, and role as a source, transit, and destination country for wildlife and wildlife products. The illegal wildlife trade in the Philippines is estimated to be worth around USD 1 billion annually, with endangered species such as the Philippine forest turtle, Philippine pangolin, hawksbill turtle, and other native wildlife frequently confiscated (van der Pal, 2026). Likewise, despite its critically endangered status and conservation efforts,

the Philippine eagle continues to be captured and traded illegally (Dela Peña, 2023).

While some forms of hunting may be managed sustainably and can support livelihoods, culture, or wildlife management, uncontrolled or poorly regulated hunting can seriously reduce wildlife populations, especially for threatened and slow-reproducing species (Rodríguez-Estival et al., 2025). This is particularly relevant to the Philippine Eagle, where understanding the different views and practices surrounding hunting can help identify more practical and locally appropriate conservation strategies.

Hunting practices are often shaped by local traditions, economic needs, and demand for wildlife products, while limited enforcement, technical knowledge, and cooperation among stakeholders can make conservation more difficult (Arroyo et al., 2022; Linares et al., 2024). Although earlier studies in the Philippines have talked about hunting in relation to sustainability, livelihood, culture, and wildlife management, there is still a need to know how different groups see hunting and conservation, especially for the critically endangered Philippine eagle.

Understanding conflicting narrative can help show how local traditions, economic needs, wildlife trade, conservation values, and people's perceptions affect their attitudes and actions. In this way, the study can provide depth to the hunting regulations and conservation efforts, as well as help conservation groups, government agencies, and local communities come up with more effective mechanisms to protect the Philippine Eagle.

Literature Review

Recreational hunting is becoming more controversial as more people, especially in urban areas, become concerned about animal welfare and the killing of wildlife (Di Minin et al., 2021). While hunting has been part of human history and culture, growing concern for animals has made many people question whether it is still acceptable. At the same time, hunting remains a regulated activity that uses wildlife as a natural resource, and when it is properly managed and guided by scientific information, it can still support wildlife and ecosystem management (Rodríguez-Estival et al., 2025).

However, hunting is not always based on scientific evidence. In some communities, it is strongly influenced by traditions, customs, and long-held beliefs. Because of this, scientific research can help provide better information for making hunting rules and finding common ground between people who support hunting and those who oppose it. Looking at hunting from social, environmental, economic, and cultural perspectives can also help make management

more practical and sustainable (Rodríguez-Estival et al., 2025).

The future of recreational hunting may depend on whether it can become more sustainable, socially accepted, and properly managed (Di Minin et al., 2021). Research has shown that hunting can sometimes be useful in managing ecosystems and supporting biodiversity, but several problems can get in the way, including limited technical training among hunters, weak connections between hunters and researchers, and limited sharing of scientific knowledge outside universities (Arroyo et al., 2022; Linares et al., 2024). For this reason, better communication, stronger use of research, and cooperation among hunters, scientists, communities, and government agencies are important in making hunting management work better (Rodríguez-Estival et al., 2025).

In Africa, although hunting is mainly done to obtain meat (Ingram et al., 2025), animals are also hunted or captured for other purposes (Tella et al., 2026). Parts such as skins, bones, skulls, horns, eggs, and feathers are sold in markets and used for traditional beliefs, medicine, and rituals (Boakye et al., 2021). This demand can put some species at greater risk, as seen with pangolins, which are heavily targeted because of the demand for their scales (Kodikara et al., 2025). In addition, the African grey parrot (*Psittacus erithacus*) has been heavily collected for the pet trade. The continued capture of these birds in African forests caused a major decline in their population, leading to their classification as globally endangered by the IUCN in 2016 (Tella et al., 2026). Their feathers and skulls are also used for traditional and medicinal purposes, adding further pressure on the species (Boakye et al., 2021).

In Equatorial Guinea, hunting was once considered sustainable for most wildlife species, but this has changed over time. Studies showed that hunting became unsustainable for several species, especially pangolins and primates that are now threatened and heavily traded (Tella et al., 2026). These threatened animals are also becoming more expensive and harder to find, showing that their populations are declining (Romero-Vidal et al., 2023). Even hunting a small number of animals can be harmful when species reproduce slowly and are already rare. This appears to be the case for elephants and great apes, which have become scarce because of continued hunting pressure (Tella et al., 2026).

Hunting practices are often influenced by local traditions, economic needs, and the demand for wildlife products. At the same time, weak law enforcement, limited knowledge, and poor coordination among different groups can make wildlife conservation more difficult (Arroyo et al.,

2022; Linares et al., 2024). Although studies have discussed hunting in terms of sustainability, livelihood, culture, and wildlife management, there is still a need to understand how different groups view hunting and conservation.

Methodology

Research Design

This study was an exploratory research that applied discourse analysis to understand the contradicting perspectives around hunting and conserving the Philippine eagle. Exploratory designs are applied when studies want to collect initial understanding of an issue that is not yet fully understood or has different views surrounding it (Verano et al., 2026). In this study, the method helped examine how people talk about hunting, wildlife protection, livelihood, culture, and the need to conserve the Philippine eagle. This study answered one critical question: how people accessed, understood, and engaged with social media information and reports about the Philippine eagle, especially in the context of hunting and conservation?

Participants

The participants of this study were from Mindanao, Philippines. Purposive sampling was applied to select the participants based on the following criteria: (1) had interacted with or engaged in social media posts or reports related to the Philippine eagle; (2) had lived in Mindanao, Philippines, for at least five years; (3) were familiar with the Philippine eagle, including its habitat, conservation, and threats; (4) had access to and regularly used social media platforms where information about the Philippine eagle was shared; and (5) were willing to participate in the interview and share their experiences and views regarding Philippine eagle conservation. Using this method, 18 participants were identified to participate in the study. Purposive sampling is applicable because it enables selecting participants who have relevant knowledge, experiences, or exposure to the topic being studied (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025).

Instrumentation

The primary data collection instrument used in this study was semi-structured interview questions. Semi-structured interview questions are designed to guide the conversation while still giving participants enough freedom to share their thoughts, experiences, and opinions in their own words (Maher & Bedwei-Majdoub, 2025). **Table 1** presents the primary questions asked during the one-on-one interview based on the objective.

Table 1. Guide questions asked during the one-on-one interview sessions

Objective	Interview Question	Thematic Guide
Explore how people in Mindanao, Philippines, accessed, understood, and engaged with social media information and reports about the Philippine eagle.	How do you usually encounter and interpret social media posts or reports about the Philippine eagle, particularly those related to hunting and conservation?	To understand how participants access social media information and how they make sense of the messages, language, and narratives used in posts or reports.
	When people talk about hunting the Philippine eagle on social media, how do you understand the different views, arguments, or messages presented in these discussions?	To examine how different positions and viewpoints about hunting are constructed and discussed through social media discourse.
	How do these social media discussions influence the way you talk about, think about, or respond to Philippine eagle conservation?	To explore how discourse shapes participants' perceptions, language, attitudes, and possible actions toward conservation.

Data Collection

Data collection was systematically done to ensure that the research process was properly followed and that the participants' rights were respected. Before the interviews, possible participants were contacted through email or Messenger and were given clear information about the purpose of the study, what the interview would cover, and how the data would be collected. They were also told that participating in the study was completely voluntary and that their personal information and answers would be kept private.

Before each interview started, the participants were asked to sign an informed consent form to confirm that they understood the study and agreed to participate. The interviews were conducted

through phone calls or Messenger, depending on what was easier and more accessible for each participant.

Each interview took around 45 to 60 minutes and followed the prepared interview questions. The researcher also asked follow-up and probing questions whenever a response needed more explanation or when the participant shared something that was worth exploring further. This gave the participants enough time and space to openly share their thoughts, experiences, and views. With their permission, the interviews were audio-recorded so that their responses could be properly captured and reviewed during the analysis. The researcher also kept field notes throughout the data collection process to record important observations, details, and other points that might not have been fully captured in the recordings.

Data Analysis

Conversation analysis was applied to explore the perceptions of participants about the hunting or conservation of the Philippine eagle. This approach examines interactions to determine how participants use language for different purposes, such as sharing information, seeking clarification, expressing views, or providing suggestions (Saifuddin et al., 2024). In this study, sample online conversations were given to the participants, and they were asked to describe the intention of the responses in relation to hunting or conservation of the Philippine eagle. The participants were also asked to explain how they understood the words, tone, and messages used in the conversations and what these responses showed about the views of the people involved. Their answers were then reviewed to identify common ways of talking about hunting, wildlife protection, responsibility, and conservation. This helped the study look not only at what people said but also at how they expressed their ideas and views through online conversations.

Results

Before conducting the study, a set of online posts was gathered about the conservation and hunting of Philippine eagles. The posts were selected from social media discussions that contained different views, opinions, and reactions toward hunting and conservation. These included posts that supported conservation efforts, raised concerns about hunting, discussed possible reasons for hunting, or encouraged people to protect the Philippine eagle.

Figure 1 presents different discourses surrounding the hunting and conservation of the Philippine eagle. Some comments linked eagle hunting to human expansion and development, suggesting that the loss of wildlife was connected to the growing use of land and resources. Others used humor and casual language that could make hunting

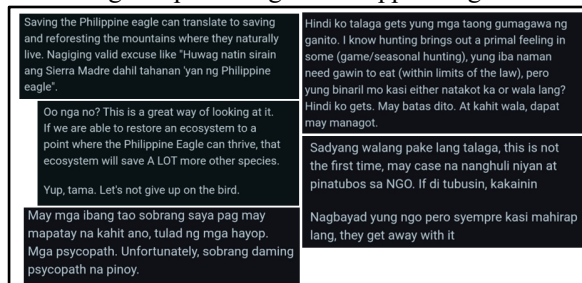
and animal killing seem less serious. Economic concerns were also raised, particularly the idea that financial rewards could encourage people to capture eagles for profit. Other statements reflected an ecocentric view, emphasizing that humans are not the only inhabitants of the planet and should not decide the survival of other species.

Figure 1. Snippets of social media comments about hunting the Philippine eagle



Figure 2 presents different comments about conserving the Philippine eagle. The statements showed that saving the Philippine eagle was viewed as a broader conservation effort involving habitat restoration, ecosystem protection, and changes in human attitudes toward wildlife. Most statements frame the problem partly as an issue of human attitudes and values toward wildlife and suggest that changing these attitudes may be important for conservation. They also pointed to weak enforcement and lack of accountability as challenges that could affect efforts to protect the Philippine eagle.

Figure 2. Snippets of social media comments about conserving and protecting the Philippine eagle



The participants of this study were asked to describe the meaning of these comments and explain how they viewed the intentions of the commenters. They were encouraged to share how they understood the words, tone, and messages used in each comment and whether they viewed them as supportive, critical, humorous, or neutral toward Philippine eagle hunting and conservation.

Meaning 1 – Hunting as a form of ‘livelihood’

The participants believed that financial incentives were perceived as a possible reason for hunting the Philippine eagle. Participants believed that rewards intended to support eagle conservation could unintentionally encourage some people to capture eagles because of the money involved. This suggests that hunting was viewed not only as an environmental issue but also as an economic activity influenced by financial opportunities, with participants emphasizing the need for proper management of government rewards to prevent their misuse.

“For me, the money can become a reason why some people hunt the eagle.”

“If there is a financial reward for capturing an eagle, some people might be encouraged to look for them because they know they can get money from it.”

“Maybe the intention of the government is to save the eagle, but if the reward is not properly managed, people might capture eagles just to receive the money.”

Meaning 2 – Pragmatic views on hunting

Interpretations showed a pragmatic view of hunting, where participants recognized that hunting may be acceptable under certain conditions and that not all animals are necessarily viewed as requiring human protection. Some participants emphasized responsible and lawful hunting, while others believed that humans should not always interfere with nature or determine which species should survive. This suggests that the participants viewed the issue from a pragmatic perspective, balancing human actions, wildlife laws, and the idea that nature should be allowed to take its own course.

“For me, the important thing is responsible hunting. People should know what animals they can hunt and what animals need to be protected by law.”

“For some people, hunting is okay because they believe that humans are not responsible for preserving every animal.”

“Some people might say that we are not the ones who decide whether the eagle should survive or not. Maybe, it’s just the way of nature.”

Meaning 3 – Moral concerns about hunting

The participants believed that there is a strong moral concern about hunting the Philippine eagle, particularly when it was done for entertainment,

personal satisfaction, or without a clear need. Participants viewed the killing of a rare species as wrong and questioned the attitude of people who took pleasure in harming animals. They also emphasized that the Philippine eagle is a living creature with a right to survive, reflecting a sense of compassion, respect for wildlife, and human responsibility to protect endangered species.

“I don’t understand why some people would be happy about killing an animal, especially one that is already becoming rare.”

“It is morally wrong to kill the eagle just for fun or because someone wants to prove that they can hunt it.”

“We should not treat the Philippine eagle as something that can simply be killed whenever people want. It is a living creature that also has a right to survive.”

Meaning 4 – Humans as superior beings

There is also a clear connotation that humans were seen as more powerful and important than other species. Participants suggested that some people believe humans have the authority to decide what happens to the Philippine eagle, especially when human needs and interests are involved. This view may reduce concern for eagle conservation because the species is treated as less important than human development, livelihood, or other priorities.

“Some people think that because humans are more powerful, we have the right to decide what happens to the eagle.”

“For some, humans are more important than animals, so protecting the eagle may not be their priority.”

“They may see the eagle as just an animal, while human needs and interests are considered more important.”

Discussion

There is a notable concept that this study introduced to the literature. Competing narratives might hamper wildlife conservation, especially when they build a culture that normalizes hunting, animal killing, and the idea that humans have greater rights over wildlife. While some narratives viewed the Philippine eagle as a species that should be protected, others framed hunting as acceptable, economically beneficial, or simply part of nature. These conflicting views may create uncertainty about who is responsible

for protecting the eagle and may weaken public support for conservation efforts.

In the context of wildlife management, some researchers believe that biodiversity conservation may become less effective when it is separated from people’s daily relationships, experiences, and practices involving wildlife (Shephard et al., 2023). People are also part of the food web, so activities such as hunting and fishing can create a close and sometimes complicated relationship with wildlife (Nyboer et al., 2022). Although killing animals is often viewed as a form of human control and exploitation, sustainable hunting and fishing can also be understood as part of the natural predator–prey relationship (Shephard et al., 2024; Shephard et al., 2024). In this study, such belief was also present as humans are part of nature and therefore have the freedom to use wildlife for food, livelihood, or other needs. People’s understanding of hunting may be shaped by their experiences, beliefs, and perceived relationship with nature, which can create different and sometimes competing views about Philippine eagle conservation.

However, some participants noted that hunting the Philippine eagle is not the same as hunting fish. Unlike many fish species that may be harvested under regulated conditions, the Philippine eagle is a highly threatened and legally protected species, making its hunting a much more serious conservation concern (Sutton et al., 2025). The difference also lies in the condition and role of the species in the ecosystem, since the loss of a Philippine eagle can have greater implications for an already limited population. As a result, differences in hunting intensity may lead to different wildlife responses to recreational activities, including nonmotorized activities, even with hiking and biking (Peters et al., 2025). This suggests that wildlife management should consider the specific species involved, the level of threat it faces, and how human activities may affect their behavior, habitat, and survival.

Several factors may make it harder to implement hunting management. These include limited technical training among some hunters, weak connections between hunters and researchers, limited sharing of scientific information outside academic settings, and social or cultural beliefs within the hunting community (Rodríguez-Estival et al., 2025). In the case of the Philippine eagle, these challenges may become more serious because some people may not fully understand its protected status, ecological importance, or the possible effects of hunting on its small population.

Furthermore, a key challenge in the Philippines was the monetary incentive given to individuals who reported or captured Philippine eagles. Although the incentive was intended to

encourage people to help rescue and protect the species, some participants believed that it could also create an unintended motivation to capture eagles for financial gain. Moral hazard occurs when people act in ways that benefit them under a payment program, but their actions go against the main goals of the program. This can happen when payments for certain behaviors unintentionally create incentives for other actions that are not being monitored (Kerr et al., 2025). For example, payments intended to improve children's well-being increased pregnancy rates in India (Nandi & Laxminarayan, 2016) and Honduras (Stecklov et al., 2007) because the payments were provided per child instead of per household.

This discourse analysis challenged the common view of recreational hunting and conservation as completely opposing activities. It raised an important question: Is it really possible to create a balance between the two?

The findings suggested that such a balance may be possible only when hunting is carefully regulated, supported by clear scientific evidence, and practiced without threatening vulnerable species. However, the situation becomes more difficult when hunting involves a highly threatened species such as the Philippine eagle, where even limited killing may have serious effects on its population.

The contradicting views also showed that conservation is not only about laws and regulations but also about people's beliefs, economic interests, cultural practices, and understanding of their responsibility toward wildlife. Thus, achieving a balance requires clear limits on hunting, stronger enforcement, responsible conservation programs, and greater involvement of local communities in protecting wildlife. These aspects are known to be less consistently implemented in the Philippines (Agduma et al., 2023), which makes it difficult to maintain a clear balance between human activities and wildlife protection.

Conclusion

This discourse analysis interpreted the online comments differently, showing that hunting the Philippine eagle was connected to livelihood, practical views, moral concerns, and human dominance over nature. Some believed that financial rewards could encourage people to capture eagles, while others saw hunting as acceptable when it followed certain rules or when humans should simply allow nature to take its course. On the other hand, some strongly disagreed with killing the eagle, especially for fun, and believed that humans have a responsibility to protect a rare species. Others viewed humans as more powerful and important than animals, which could make wildlife protection less of a priority.

These contradicting views showed that competing narratives can make wildlife conservation more difficult. While some people saw the Philippine eagle as a species that must be protected, others viewed hunting as part of livelihood, nature, or human use of wildlife. This supports the idea that conservation cannot be separated from people's experiences and relationships with nature. However, participants also pointed out that hunting the Philippine eagle is different from typical recreational hunting because the eagle is highly threatened and legally protected. This means that human activities, including hunting and even other recreational activities, need to be considered based on their possible effects on the species, its habitat, and its survival.

This study yielded notable challenges in conserving the Philippine eagle. The study showed that balancing hunting and conservation is not simple, especially for a highly threatened species like the Philippine eagle. Effective conservation therefore needs clear hunting limits, stronger enforcement, better management of incentives, science-based programs, and stronger involvement of local communities so that human activities do not come at the expense of wildlife protection.

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