



# Viva Candaba! Celebrating Central Luzon's Great Floodplain

The Candaba wetland is a vast complex of freshwater ponds, swamps and marshes with surrounding areas of seasonally flooded grassland, arable land and palm savanna on a vast alluvial flood plain<sup>1</sup>. Known also as “Pinac”, the 32,000 ha area is usually flooded in the wet season, but most of it dries out during the dry season (late November to April) and is converted into rice fields and plantations of watermelons and corn.

The area is notably known also for being a sanctuary to migratory birds that traverses the East Asian-Australasian Flyway (EAAF). Because of this, the Candaba Wetlands has been declared as an Important Bird Area and one of the six (6) priority areas in Luzon for the protection of water birds and threatened species.

Candaba wetlands is a natural flood retention basin formed by the deposition of sediments from the Pampanga and Angat Rivers that surround the swamp. Despite the constant flooding however, the Pinac is not without settlers even long before the Spanish conquest in the Philippines.

Unknown to many, the site is also one of the oldest settlements in Luzon as evidenced by the founding of a basalt adze that dates to about 3,000 BC. H. Otley Bayer theorized that this was used to hollow out logs to make boats used to reach deeper portions of the wetland. Various pottery shards dating to as far back as 1000 AD were also found evidencing settlement and trade. Today, Candaba is the home to 102,399 individuals based on a 2010 census<sup>6</sup>.

The long history of settlement in the extensive floodplain produced unique cultural activities or “Fiestas” that can only be found in the area.

The “Fiesta” or Feast is an important Filipino cultural and religious event wherein a patron saint is honored with different festivities. Coming from Spain’s 300-year influence, it is celebrated by a particular area by having street dancing, and events wherein the community is expected to participate. A Philippine Fiesta can also be a celebration of anything a town deems important to its identity.

## Celebration in Water



In Candaba, the fiesta is celebrated with the coming of the yearly flood which brings with it fishes that people can eat or harvest while agriculture is halted. This is known as the Fiestang Danum which translates to Feast of the Water. According to Mr. Amador S. Baylon from the Municipal Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (MDRRMO) of Candaba, long-time residents expect the yearly flood and prepare for the fiesta wherein the community holds a procession and street dancing in the flood waters.

In the nearby Apalit, a fluvial parade locally known as “Libad” is celebrated to honour St. Peter or Apung Iru since 1844. Though not celebrated in the Candaba wetland itself, it recognizes one of the main water bodies that formed and is continuing to nourish it: the great Pampanga River which the devotees consider as an important resource for giving bountiful harvests and fishes<sup>3</sup>.

## Viva Candaba

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources Region III recognizes the capability of the Candaba Wetlands for flood mitigation and ground water recharge. However, this function, together with its supporting services for biodiversity, food, and tourism is threatened by continuous developments in the area. Over the years, Candaba has seen the proliferation of new warehouses, subdivisions, resorts and low-rise buildings in what were before are swampy areas.

Note: (1) SCPW, Agricultural Wetlands as a Showcase for Wetlands Conservation. (2) The Utilization of Candaba Swamp from Prehistoric to Present Time: Evidences from Archaeology, History, and Ethnography (Melendres R.G) [http://www.academia.edu/10441415/The\\_Utilization\\_of\\_Candaba\\_Swamp\\_from\\_Prehistoric\\_to\\_Present\\_Time\\_Evidences\\_from\\_Archaeology\\_History\\_and\\_Ethnography](http://www.academia.edu/10441415/The_Utilization_of_Candaba_Swamp_from_Prehistoric_to_Present_Time_Evidences_from_Archaeology_History_and_Ethnography) (3) <https://businessmirror.com.ph/pampanga-river-hosts-171st-fluvial-parade-honoring-st-peter/>





To raise more awareness and to celebrate Candaba Wetlands as an important bird area is the objective of the Ibon-Ebon Festival which means “Birds and Eggs Festival”. Celebrating bountiful harvest, it also welcomes the migratory birds which makes the wetland their home<sup>4</sup>. It features street dancing, cooking competitions, kite flying, bird costume contest, and bird watching.

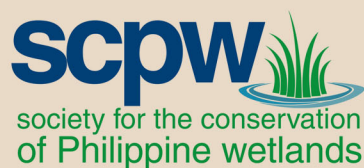
The festival started in 1998 until a five-year hiatus starting 2013. This 2018, the festival which is observed every first week of February by the Local Government – just in time for the World Wetlands Day – is back to endorse once again the protection of the environment, welcome migratory birds, and also, to feature local products of Candaba.



Photo by Renzelle Ann Palma for choosephilippines.com

Fiestas are indeed part of the Filipino culture and identity. Although not a very unique activity as other cultures also have fiestas, religion and natural environment, in this case, weave together to create celebrations that can only be found in the Philippines. As these events continue to honor patron saints and the shared religious bonds, they can also be effective avenues to raise environmental awareness as in the case of Candaba.

### Mapping Wetland Priorities for Ecosystem - based Disaster Risk Reduction (Eco-DRR) and Climate Change Adaptation (EbA) in the Philippines



Society for the Conservation of the Philippine Wetlands, Inc.  
Department of Environment and Natural Resources - Biodiversity  
Management Bureau  
Ramsar Regional Centre - East Asia

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Note: (4) Ibon-Ebon Festival - The Fabulous Fiesta (Guia, J. 2012)  
<https://www.vigattintourism.com/tourism/articles/Ibon-Ebon-Festival-The-Fabulous-Fiesta>

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