

Profile

I grew up in Des Moines, Iowa and developed a love of science while reading Scientific American and National Geographic in high school. During my undergrad at the University of Michigan I majored in biology and journalism and interned with the AAAS during my junior and senior year editing science news articles for Science Magazine. After graduation I pursued a master's degree in Life Sciences Communication from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and later found a position with the Associated Press (AP) covering Science, Technology and Environmental news throughout the world.

How did I get involved?

I was working on an article about deforestation, logging practices and species diversity in Southeast Asia, and I came to Manila to meet with representatives from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. Gloria, one of my contacts in the Department informed me of an outbreak of a virus of unknown strain and origin in the area surrounding Subic Bay and Olongapo City. Rumor has it that the virus was hidden deep in the forests and made its way out because of deforestation in the area and the encroachment of urban populations. Richard Preston wrote about a similar effect in his book The Hot Zone and I'm initially inclined to believe it's true. Gloria is heading to the Roosevelt Preserve to meet with a group from the University of the Philippines that is working on collecting samples from the forest preserve for testing. A few days ago, another group collecting samples also found an abandoned illegal logging camp as well. Gloria invited me to tag along, and my plan was to speak to members of the team and get an expert's perspective for my article. The idea of another virus jumping out of the forest, if true, will add a new angle to my article about the effects of deforestation in The Philippines. The area where the outbreak occurred is an area with high traffic and tourism. The government and many people in the Subic Bay and Olongapo area are dependent on tourist dollars and they are worried about how the outbreak will affect revenue to this area.

The following are journal excerpts

- "...Gloria informed me that The Philippines is one of the most heavily deforested countries in Southeast Asia. Rosewood, Teak and Mahogany are especially sought after for their value in furniture and other products. The Aquino administration recently banned logging without a permit and tightened the requirements for any company or individual to receive a logging permit..."
- "...There have been over 18 deaths so far and many more are sick. I've heard from my AP colleagues that recent tourists to the area have also fell ill after going home. A couple in Hamburg, Germany, a Filipino-Canadian from Winnipeg visiting family and a US Navy Petty Officer on vacation are some of the notable ones that became sick...that explains why the CDC sent someone to investigate..."
- "After visiting the illegal logging site with authorities, I spoke with an American wildlife biologist doing research on bats in the area. They were working with an epidemiologist from the CDC, helping them to collect wildlife specimens for testing. The wildlife biologist showed me several bat species and rodent species that were endemic to the Philippines. I remember from a microbiology class I took once that bats and rodents could carry disease that may affect humans. Maria, a tree expert showed me a stand of mahogany and teak trees and pointed to some flying foxes that were nesting there..."

- “...looks like the illegal tree loggers disturbed several stands of trees containing flying foxes and some smaller bat species that I don’t know. Deforestation is prevalent across the Philippines, and leads to species displacement...it looks like the bat species just migrated to the edge of town, near some pig farms...”
- “...a few of those that were hit by this virus worked at a logging and timber company near San Fernando City. Two of them died and three others are still sick. Their boss, Augustine Jimenez, just found out that this group was using company resources to illegally log mahogany from around the Roosevelt Preserve and Bataan National Park and selling them on the Black Market. Needless to say he wasn’t happy...”
- “...spoke with Mr. Jimenez. He said that before they got sick, the 5 workers went on a three day excursion. Well we know now that they were logging near Olongapo. When they returned to work they brought back some fresh bush meat and gave them to several other workers. Looks like monkey, flying fox and civets were distributed. About a week and a half later, the folks that took home the bush meat got sick. Two died and 4 others are still sick. Mr. Jimenez is worried about how this will affect his company. Some of the workers are afraid to come back to work...”
- “...Flying foxes, civets and macaques (pron.“ma-cack”) (a type of monkey) are known to be delicacies. Bats are generally feared culturally, but it does not stop them from ending up on someone’s dinner plate...”
- I’ve included some photos that I took or provided to me by sources I interviewed



Pic 1- Members of Mr. Jimenez’s logging company



Pic 2- Live Flying fox caught for sample collection



Pic 3- Crab eating macaque found in the wild

Points to Ponder prior to discussion:

From your profile, what are some important facts you know about the outbreak?

What do you need to know about the outbreak?

What do you believe is the cause and source of outbreak? Why?

How do you think the virus is being transmitted?

Are there any terms on the previous pages that are unfamiliar to you? If so define them