

Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program



August 2013

Issue: 13

Code RED

An e-newsletter from your friends in Borneo

Dear Friends and Supporters,

We are so grateful to have had the opportunity this summer to help host Indonesia's national Nature Lover's meeting and have this group of young conservationists visit Gunung Palung National Park. This bi-annual meeting provides after school Nature Lover Groups from all over Indonesia an opportunity to learn about the amazing biodiversity their country has to offer and join together to give back to local communities



through social service activities. Providing students, our future conservation leaders, with avenues to learn about and connect with nature helps to build their appreciation and knowledge of their natural world and the resources that are so vital to healthy and sustainable lives. Contributing to the national meeting this year was a wonderful opportunity for us to share the wonder and value of Gunung Palung National Park with everyone, and to contribute our expertise in environmental education to a wider audience. We are so thrilled that everyone thoroughly enjoyed their time camping in the rainforest and participating in the many educational and service activities throughout the event.

I am excited to introduce our new volunteer research assistant, Robert Suro Rodriguez, who will be working with our team at the Cabang Panti research station inside Gunung Palung National Park over the next year.

In This Issue:

**Nature Lover Clubs
from all over Indonesia
visit Gunung Palung
National Park**

~

**Welcome To
Robert Suro Rodriguez**

~

**World Orangutan Day
Celebrations!**

~

**Help us Protect
Orangutans!**

**World Orangutan
Day
Celebrations!**



Robert is a former undergraduate student of mine at Boston University with experience in primate field research in Ecuador. In addition to assisting with orangutan behavioral follows and ecological research, Robert will also be documenting his time with the project through numerous communication venues such as Facebook, Twitter and via a blog. Keep an eye out on our website and Facebook page for exciting and informative updates from the field. With his adventurous spirit, sharp intellect and team-oriented outlook we could not be more pleased to have him join our project!

Thank you so very much to everyone for your continued support of our work. Happy reading!

Sincerely,



Cheryl Knott, Executive Director
[Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program \(GPOCP\)](#)

Nature Lover Clubs from all over Indonesia visit Gunung Palung National Park

Last month, members of Nature Lover Groups from all over Indonesia, including those GPOCP supports, joined Pangudi Luhur's Nature Lover's National Meeting in Borneo, which took place this year in Gunung Palung National Park. GPOCP started our after school Nature Lover Clubs as a way of developing local teacher capacity, as the teachers' associations that we support sponsor the clubs. The informal association brings together teachers from Ketapang and Kayong Utara, with GPOCP providing materials and training.



Nature Lover Club students prepare for camping in Gunung Palung National Park

St. John High School in Ketapang, West Kalimantan, was given the opportunity to host this bi-annual national meeting in 2013. The organizing committee spent more than two months preparing for the event, in collaboration with Yayasan Palung (GPOCP). As one of the nature lover groups that we assist, it was natural for us to provide technical and networking support, connecting the organizing committee with various institutions to ensure a successful event! Some of the organizations that participated included Kayong Utara Regency, Kayong Utara Marine Affairs and Fisheries Office, Ketapang Office of National Search and Rescue Agency, the Gunung Palung National Park Management Office, and GPOCP's Youth Volunteer Group - REBONK.

For World Orangutan Day on August 19th, our team and volunteer youth groups were in full swing raising awareness throughout Ketapang, Indonesia about orangutans and the threats they face. With banners, posters, stickers, puppets and songs, passing motorists and pedestrians could not help but join in the celebration for this magnificent primate! Look for the full details of how we commemorated this important day in next month's issue. For more information on this global inaugural event visit the [World Orangutan Day website](#).

~~~~~

### Help us Protect Orangutans!

[Make A Donation](#)

[Like us on Facebook](#) 

 [Join our Mailing List](#)

~~~~~

"Nobody makes a greater mistake than he who does nothing because he could only do a little."

~Edmund Burke~



Nature Lover Clubs National Meeting participants hike into the forest

As many as 80 participants from 10 Pangudi Luhur High Schools throughout Indonesia participate in this event every year, and trek through various types of ecosystems, learning about their biodiversity. This year the routes traversed rubber and fruit orchards in Pampang, coastal habitat in Pasir Mayang and Mak Bagok beach, salt water tide forest in Penage, and rocky lowland forest in Aik Benuang, before eventually finishing at Pulau Datok Beach. In addition to hiking, participants also contributed to social service activities with communities in the Ketapang and Kayong Utara (KKU) districts, visited the KKU fish nursery, and met with craftsmen from GPOCP's Non-Timber Forest Product (NTFP) Artisan Groups project.



Visit to the KKU fish nursery

As part of the social service component of the event, participants cleaned litter from the streets of KKU, the graveyard, mosques, schools, and soccer fields, as well as built fences for houses. Equipment and materials were provided by the local community. At the KKU fish nursery, students learned about the breeding process of catfish, carps, and dragon fish with an instructor from the KKU Marine Affairs and Fisheries Office. During their meetings with craftsmen from nearby villages, participants also had an opportunity to observe how some of the

NTFP products are made, such as *pandanus* woven mats and *nipah* spine woven baskets.



NTFP Artisans demonstrate basket weaving for Nature Lover Club students

Throughout the event, everyone spent the night in tents within the forest, where they experienced first-hand much of the amazing wildlife Borneo has to offer. The students shared with us their excitement at being able to come to Borneo, to see the famous rainforest, and to learn about the area's conservation challenges. We hope that these students, the future leaders of the nation and conservation movement, will remember this experience, and remain committed to conservation values throughout their lives, sharing their environmental ethics and knowledge with everyone they meet!

Being the primary local provider of conservation education and awareness in the Gunung Palung region, we are honored to have had the opportunity to assist St. John High School in hosting this national education meeting in Gunung Palung National Park, the forest range we work so tirelessly to protect, and to have our own Nature Lover Clubs participate in the event as well. With environmental destruction continuing throughout Indonesia at an alarming rate, opportunities for people to experience and understand nature first-hand dwindle, therefore activities such as spending the night in the forest and hiking through different ecosystems provide vital experiences that allow Indonesians to connect with, and appreciate nature, and ultimately make the choice to save their local natural environment. We plan to continue supporting and expanding our Nature Lover Clubs in the coming years and hope to have the opportunity to contribute to the planning of another Nature Lover's National Meeting in the future.

Welcome To Robert Suro Rodriguez

Our Newest Volunteer Research Assistant

We are very excited to have Robert Suro Rodriguez join our research team and field site for the next year! Robert is a recent graduate from Boston University, where he completed a bachelor's degree in Biology and



Robert Suro Rodriguez in Ecuador

Anthropology. A former student of Dr. Cheryl Knott, he will be volunteering as a research assistant at Cabang Panti Research Station in Gunung Palung National Park.

Robert owes his appreciation for nature, and his desire to explore it, to his childhood experiences of camping and hiking around his home island of Puerto Rico. Since then, his love for the outdoors and learning about the

natural world has only grown. He says that while he's always been interested in the life sciences as a field of study, it wasn't until college that his interest for studying biology and ecology really matured. "I originally enrolled in BU's biology program to satisfy pre-med requirements with the intent to go on to med school; it wasn't until I took a few courses in animal behavior and biological anthropology that I started leaning towards this route instead."

The period in his college career that really set him off on this path however, was his experience studying abroad in Ecuador during the fall of 2012. This program, which was designed as a three-block course in tropical ecology and field biology, took students to some of the most diverse and biologically interesting parts of not only Ecuador, but the world. "We got to spend 7 days in the Galapagos, where we traveled around on a private charter boat and visited 10 different islands. We even went during October, the same month Charles Darwin was there, which I thought was really great!" Throughout the semester, students designed and carried out their own research projects, which gave them valuable experience in how to think of research questions, and design studies to answer them. "One of the major highlights of the trip was being able to spend an entire month living in the Amazon, at the Tiputini Biodiversity Station. This is located in the Yasuní Biosphere reserve, the region of the world with the highest biodiversity. We were able to explore the trails completely independently, and study whatever we wanted; and there was so much to see, that the research possibilities were endless."



Robert exploring the rainforest

Robert spent a lot of his time there studying some of the ten species of primates found in the area. "There were a few primatologists working at the station, and I went with them on some behavioral follows. I spent a lot of time following groups of spider monkeys. It is really interesting to get a glimpse into what their life is like. They create alliances, have their own little dramas, and sometimes you see things like an individual sneaking off from the rest of the group to mate with someone else in secret. If you watch them over a long enough period of time, you realize it's kind of like a soap opera set in the jungle starring a bunch of monkeys. They have lives and social relationships just like humans do."

For the next year, Robert hopes to take advantage of his past experiences in Ecuador and apply what he's learned to his volunteer job at Cabang Panti Research Station. He'll be assisting in behavioral follows of orangutans and collecting data about their behavior, diet, and ecology. He will also be working to publish news, updates, and photos from the field via blogging and social media websites like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, and will be writing a special blog documenting his work and experiences.

"I really want to be able to communicate to others what it's like living here, and how special the rainforest and all the diverse life that's found here is. I have a sense of appreciation for these places and know the value and importance of their conservation because I've been lucky enough to visit them and see what they're like first-hand, but most people in the world don't ever get the chance. Why would anyone who's never really experienced nature care about conserving it? There's this great



Robert makes some vine art on a very rainy day

quote by a Senegalese poet named Baba Dioum that goes 'In the end, we conserve only what we love. We will love only what we understand. We will understand only what we are taught'. If you're not able to experience nature first-hand, the only way you're going to create that understating, and thus love for nature, is if someone informs you about it. You can be a great naturalist, but if you only stick to doing great science and publishing in scientific journals, the only people that are going to read it are people who are already fascinated with nature, which does not do very much for conservation. The best way to achieve the goals of conservation is to bring the public on board with what biologists already know: nature is pretty awesome!"

When Robert is not busy working, his favorite things to do are hiking, traveling, rock climbing, and photography. He says that "ideally, the best job in the future would be one where I can do science plus all of those things at the same time!"

Read Robert's blog at <http://www.fotoethnographies.blogspot.com>.
Subscribe to his Facebook page <http://www.facebook.com/adventurefirst>

Also follow our Facebook page
at <https://www.facebook.com/GunungPalungOrangutanProject> for special updates from Robert and the rest of the GPOP and GPOCP teams!

Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program
(GPOCP)



Orangutan Photographs © Tim Laman
Photos of Robert © Robert Suro Rodriguez
All other photographs © GPOCP staff