

Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program



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An e-newsletter from your friends in Borneo

Dear Supporters,

We're kicking off the year strong in our efforts to protect orangutans and their habitat. This month we held our first high school field trip of the year with an overnight camping trip to the Pasir Mayong Beach near Gunung Palung National Park. As always, these students continue to amaze us with their insight on conservation issues and their observations of the world around them. We are so happy to see our environmental education program laying a strong foundation for these students in



their understanding of their environment, the threats posed to it and what conserving it will mean, not only in their lives but the lives of orangutans and other wildlife.

We also continue our spotlight series on the field assistants of our research program, the [Gunung Palung Orangutan Project](#). This month meet Hassan, and hear in his own words what his job means to him, and how he got his start. We are also very excited to be entering our second year of our Orangutan Caring Scholarship (OCS) program, where two of the most promising students from the

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Orangutans!

New Facebook Page

If you haven't had a chance, visit our new English [Facebook page](#), and stay further connected to our work and the orangutans of Gunung Palung National Park!

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regencies of Ketapang and Kayong Utara receive full University scholarships to Tanjungpura University in Pontianak.

Please enjoy the stories in this issue and continue following our efforts to conserve orangutans and their rainforest home!

Cheryl Knott, Executive Director

As always, thank you for your support!

[Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program \(GPOCP\)](#)

## A Classroom with a Twist: Environmental Education in the Forest

Mariamah Achmad - Yayasan Palung (GPOCP)

On the 26th and 27th of January 2013, the Environmental Education team from Yayasan Palung took the Student Nature Lovers Club (Siswa Pencinta Alam - SISPALA) from Senior High School Repatones Pangudi SMA Santo Yohanes on a field trip to Pasir Mayang Beach. The goal of the field trip was for the students to become more familiar with the local environment and learn about the many natural wonders right in their own backyards, as well as to inaugurate the club's new members.



Students hiking to their campsite

Students were divided into four groups for the journey to Yayasan Palung's Environmental Education Center in Sukadana, near Gunung Palung National Park, so they could more intensively observe and discuss the flora, fauna and different socio-economic communities along the way. Once at the Center, the group hiked the last leg of the trip to reach the campground at Teluk Penage Bamboo Forest. The hike took three hours and the group passed through community-owned mixed farms, secondary forest, coastal mangrove forest vegetation and rock cliffs. Along the way, coastal degradation, due to human activity such as forest clearing for agricultural lands and mining, could be clearly seen.

The group arrived at the campground in the late afternoon, where they diligently worked to set up the campsite and searched for wood to cook their dinner. These activities are part of the 'Wilderness Life Techniques' skills training our high school students undergo with support of our environmental education program.

Once camp was set up, the group gathered to

## 2013 Orangutan Caring Scholarships

GPOCP has started busily organizing our 2013 Orangutan Caring Scholarship (OCS) Program. This year will mark the second round of this exciting program that awards scholarships to two of the best students from the Ketapang and Kayong Utara regencies to attend University in the West Kalimantan Provincial Capital, Pontianak. The program, run in Partnership with [Orang Utan Republik Foundation](#) and [Orangutan Outreach](#), was started in West Kalimantan in 2012. These first scholarship recipients are enjoying this opportunity as they pursue their studies at Tanjungpura University in Pontianak. We look forward to our 2013 recipients joining them in the coming months, as we complete this year's selection round.

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

~Edmund Burke~



Students learning how to make a fire for cooking dinner

discuss the conservation of orangutans. Deeply engaged in the material, they asked many interesting questions such as: "Why are orangutans only found on the island of Sumatra and Borneo? Do rehabilitated orangutans stay in cages for the rest of their lives?" One student, who comes from

a village that still has old growth forest, asked if "it is okay for orangutans to be released back into forests such as the one in his village." It's so encouraging for us to see youth asking these questions and thinking about potential solutions for conservation issues, as they grow into tomorrow's conservation leaders.

After our discussions, the four groups made presentations to each other about the flora, fauna and socio-economic conditions of the local communities they observed during the road journey to the campsite. Damage to forests and beaches was the most widely raised topic in the presentations, showing the students' sensitivity to environmental situations. After dinner the groups relaxed, enjoyed the scenery and played games on the moonlit beach until they fell asleep.



Students discuss their observations of the environment

The next morning the students awoke at 5 am to exercise, make breakfast and begin packing up the campsite. Before leaving the forest, the official inauguration for new members took place and was marked with the SISPALA oath and signing. Once the inauguration ended, the group hiked back up the hills and out of the bamboo forest towards the Environmental Education Center, returning to their school in Ketapang later that afternoon.

Mr. Agus Sekti Atmojo Susila, the Repatones School Principal, who has been on many Yayasan Palung Field Trips with his students says "learning activities in the forest allows students to see, feel, discover, learn, discuss, analyze, and present findings about plants, water, animals and other natural elements. After students present

their observations, the Yayasan Palung team always helps clarify any misinformation and provides reinforcement of the material learned. The atmosphere is intimate, and equal interaction between teachers and students to co-create the material is readily accepted by students. The approach taken by Yayasan Palung greatly impacts the mentality of students in understanding the importance of conservation, and at the same time increases knowledge in the subjects of biology, physics and chemistry."

## Meet Hassan

### Spotlight on the Research Assistants of the Gunung Palung Orangutan Project's Research Program

Prior to becoming a Gunung Palung Orangutan Project (GPOP) research assistant, Hassan held a series of unpleasant jobs. He recalls his life experiences and how he became a GPOP research assistant...

I remember my days in elementary school - they were pretty tough years due to not living with my parents, but rather with a collection of different family members. Money was always tight and we never really had enough to pay for the basic need of (enough) food to feed all the family members, never mind extra money for attending school. I guess I was quite the entrepreneur as I was always dreaming up new schemes to gain that little bit of extra money to aid my family members with everyday living costs. I remember when I was in Third Grade, I asked permission from my principal to sell cakes and cold beverages to the other students. The money I received from this was not used as 'extra pocket money' but rather to pay my school fees, and to buy clothes and school books.



Hassan collecting data in the field

After I graduated from elementary school, due to economic constraints, I did not continue my education into high school. Instead, at 14 years old I was forced to look for work. I carried out a combination of jobs, such as working for a hotel and collecting swallow nests for 'bird nest soup' and traditional medicine. I struggled with my conscience every day when collecting these nests. I loathed doing this. I knew it was wrong, but I unfortunately did not have any other choice, as I had to eat and provide for my basic subsistence needs. Thankfully, an opportunity came my way in 2001. An opening for a research assistant at GPOP became available. As I am passionate about nature and wildlife I could not believe my luck when I was accepted as a GPOP assistant. Finally, I thought, I have found my dream job - this is my calling. I was in awe of the forest and the wildlife that lived there. I remember the first time I was awakened by gibbons calling - it was the most amazing feeling to wake up to the calls of nature. Everyone should

have the opportunity to experience this once in their life. However, this feeling was not to last as, unfortunately, due to an intensification of illegal logging within Gunung Palung National Park, GPOP was closed in 2003. I was forced to find work elsewhere once more until GPOP re-opened in March 2008 when I was re-employed as a GPOP research assistant. Again, I could not believe my luck. After years of struggling to make ends meet, being employed in unsavory jobs, I would return to the forest of Gunung Palung and reunite with the forest and orangutans yet again. I knew there was a higher presence looking after me and my family as every day I had prayed for this day to come!



Hassan having a very good orangutan follow

From my years working as a GPOP assistant, I finally understand the environmental dangers of deforestation. I have experienced first-hand the flooding, increased temperatures and other disruptions to my traditional life, as the forests I depended on are converted to oil palm plantations, and are illegally logged and mined. However, at the same time the people who damage our forest face the same financial pressures as anyone else in my village and others like it (like I did when I was working as a swallow nest collector), and are often at a loss as to how to support their families without opting for the short-term and quick profit models based around deforestation. Whether they like it or not, whether they feel it is morally wrong or not - they too need to live! Thank you GPOCP for helping to show them that there is another way.

I have learned so much from 'Ibu' Cheryl and her past and present managers at GPOP. I now use my knowledge gained while working at the research station, Cabang Panti, to be the best ambassador I can be for GPOP, GPOCP, and of course for Gunung Palung forest and wildlife - especially orangutans that do not have a voice.

Before ending 'my story' I would like to say thank you, first and foremost to Professor 'ibu' Cheryl. You are my inspiration. I thank you with all my heart for giving me this opportunity to (i) experience such beauty that is the forest of Gunung Palung, (ii) for opening my eyes to the amazing wildlife that live in the forest, (iii) for introducing me to orangutans and (iv) for always believing in me and my ability to represent your project to the best of my ability. Finally, to all previous and present managers I have been fortunate to work with and privileged to call my friends: Dr. Meredith L Bastian, Wahyu Susanto, Josephine Beck and Dr. Gail Campbell-Smith...Terima kasih banyak teman-teman ku (Thank you very much my friends).

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