

# Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program



March 2013

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## Code RED

An e-newsletter from your friends in Borneo

Every year we participate in Orangutan Caring Week, and last November was no exception. These activities are a part of our larger Conservation Awareness program, and are a favorite event among staff. Members of one of our youth volunteer groups planned a silent art display for the event, inspiring many people throughout the regency of Ketapang to care for orangutans and their protection. Read on to learn more about their activities and this wonderful global awareness event.



With the recent return of one of our outstanding research volunteers, we bring you a special article written by Chloe Tuck, a former undergraduate student of mine at Boston University. Her dedication to her studies and deep interest in orangutan research and conservation made her an ideal research assistant. In this issue she details her experiences and connection with the project, providing a vivid glimpse into life in the field.

As always, we thank you for your support and allowing us to share

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Orangutans!**

### Shop Smart this Easter

Make wise candy selections this Easter with this palm oil-free shopping guide, and help ensure orangutans and their habitat are not harmed by your purchases. Thank you to the *Orangutan Project* for producing this helpful guide.

[Palm Oil-Free Easter Guide](#)

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**Help us Protect**

our work with you!

Cheryl Knott, Executive Director

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

## Supporting Orangutans through Silent Art Displays

GPOCP participates in Orangutan Caring Week 2012

By Petrus Kanisius "Pit", Yayasan Palung (GPOCP)

On the 29th of November 2012 the GPOCP youth volunteer group, TAJAM, partook in a silent street art display for Orangutan Caring Week 2012. The event took place at Agoes Jam roundabout in Ketapang town center, where ten volunteers stood wearing orangutan masks and holding drawings and photos of orangutans, as well as posters with messages to protect orangutans and the forest. Posters, stickers and copies of our MiAS newsletter were also handed out to passing motorists and pedestrians, further spreading the reach of our message.



Delivery of messages for Orangutan Caring Week 2012

In order to protect orangutans and advance their conservation, many parties need to develop a concern for their future in the wild, including the government, NGOs, the private sector and communities. Our actions aim to inform and communicate to the public the threats that orangutans and other species face, and the great need for local concern and action.

The event was very well received by the public. One pedestrian even commented, "it was time the situation of orangutans was noticed by all." We fully agree!

Orangutans!

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

~Edmund Burke~



TAJAM volunteer group at the Agoes Jam roundabout

Orangutan Caring week is a global campaign held every November that brings together voices from all over the world to collectively focus attention on orangutans and the threats they face. GPOCP is proud to organize the local events in Keptapang, Indonesia every year, and to be part of the global celebration that takes place in countries and communities all over the world. Together we can stand strong and jointly protect orangutans throughout Indonesia, and Malaysia!

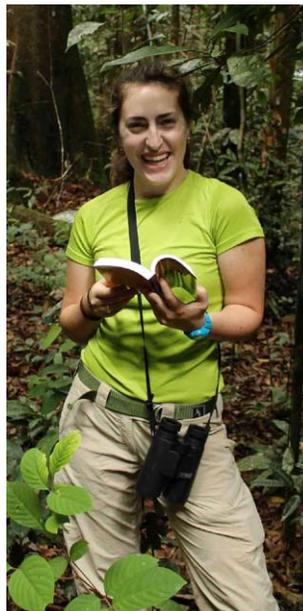
## Forest Reflections

One volunteer's experience researching orangutans with GPOP  
By Chloe Tuck, GPOP

It's 3am and I'm waking up to Gail, our Research Field Director's, alarm clock. "It's time to get up, it's 3am," it chimes in an English accent. I can't help but chuckle every time I hear this. I turn my headlamp on to get into my jungle clothes - the ever-fashionable quick-dry jungle pants, thick socks, and sweat resistant shirt. Unzipping my tent, I hope that it won't be a morning when the fire ants have invaded camp. By the light of our headlamps we move into the forest.

The hike out to the orangutan's night nest is quiet. There is an unspoken rule about not talking before 4am. One after another, Gail, the research assistants and I, move forward in a single file line. It's funny how these mornings vary.

One morning we hike up trail UB, cross the river before dawn, and clamber up the mountainside. Another morning we trek into the peat swamp and follow the convoluted trails for about an hour to get to the nest. We wait for the orangutan to wake up and urinate, the marker that our workday has begun. The time under the nest is peaceful. I sip coffee from my thermos and watch the



Chloe Tuck on an orangutan follow

fungus on nearby trees glow in the dark. I smile as I hear monkeys and gibbons start to wake up and go about their days.

Following orangutans is a unique experience. Friends and family members ask me, "so what did you do every day when you lived in the rainforest?" Well, truth be told, each day was different. Some days an orangutan would spend four hours at one tree so we would move very little, other days would require a constant hike through mountainous terrain or dense swamp. You must be ready to do whatever it takes to keep following. The orangutan will not stop to wait for the clumsy humans trying to navigate the dense forest. And there's really no point to getting moody if your feet get wet or if you fall face first into mud, as this is a regular occurrence.



Manda enjoying the fruit masting

I have just returned to the U.S. after spending 7 months living in Borneo and volunteering for the Gunung Palung Orangutan Project at the Cabang Panti Research Station inside Gunung Palung National Park. This experience was truly a once in a lifetime opportunity. I learned an incredible amount - about orangutans, the rainforest, Indonesian language and culture, and also about myself. While at the site, I alternated between accompanying field assistants on orangutan follows and staying at camp to go through the fruit samples we collected of what the orangutans' were eating. Going on follows meant learning the life stories of each research assistant. They shared with me their vast knowledge of orangutans and of the rainforest. I have so much respect for them and what they do. Through this experience, I came to understand the vast diversity of the forest.

Although I studied anthropology at Boston University, and was a student of Dr. Cheryl Knott's, I was often surprised by what I learned and observed about orangutans. They are often referred to as the most solitary of the great apes. This, however, does not mean that orangutans hardly come into contact with each other. While at Cabang Panti, I saw multiple parties of orangutans, especially during the mini-fruit masting that occurred a few months ago. I came to know orangutans as individuals. While we cannot attribute human characteristics and feelings to animals, there is no denying that orangutans are distinct in their "personalities," and eating and ranging habits. Each day we would observe and exchange hypotheses about why an animal was behaving in a certain way. It

was incredible to see the amount of variety in the orangutan diet, how it changed from week to week and from individual to individual. In the field, I observed what I had learned in the classroom. I saw an orangutan mother, Beth, make a bridge for her baby, Benny, so he could cross into a new tree. I saw a flanged male, Senja, long call and knock down a dead tree as a mating display. Above all, I came to learn just how amazing these animals are and how much we still have to learn about them.

Although I am home now, writing comfortably from a coffee shop, I will never forget my time in the Indonesian rainforest and my family that lives deep in the heart of Borneo. But I think too of the gunshots and chainsaws that can be heard from camp, and I worry. Now is the time to increase conservation efforts, to protect these remarkable animals and these beautiful forests, before it is too late.

Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program  
(GPOCP)



Orangutan Photographs © Tim Laman  
*Forest Reflections* photographs © Chloe Tuck  
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