



Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program



July 2014

Issue: 19

Code RED

An e-newsletter from your friends in Borneo

Dear Friends and Supporters,

Welcome to the latest edition of our Code RED newsletter. This month, our issue begins with the story of Ibu Ida, a woman who has been instrumental in the success of our Sustainable Livelihoods Program. This group has grown from just a few people to now comprising 93 community members who sell their handmade products to a growing market throughout much of Indonesia. Next, my graduate student at Boston University, Caitlin O'Connell, shares some of her year-long experiences as an orangutan researcher in the field, doing ground-breaking work on parasitology and sociality. Read about her unique observations studying orangutans in the rain forest of Borneo.

This newsletter comes to you just after my family's excursion to Borneo. You can follow our blogs on National Geographic's "[Postcards From Borneo](#)". As always, I am proud to bring you the stories of our community and our staff.

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

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One Village at a Time**

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Protect Orangutans!**

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Sincerely,



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

Crafting Communities, One Village at a Time

By Wendy Tamariska, Sustainable Livelihoods Coordinator
 and Yan Embik, Finance and Operations Director

In a small, remote village named Desa Sejahtera, within the Kabupaten Kayung Utara (KKU) regency, lives a mother of three, who villagers refer to as Ibu Ida. She embodies such charm and charisma that it is no wonder she is well known in her community. Ibu Ida and her husband own a small general store selling all manner of household items, from packets of coffee to detergent. When she's not busy running the family store and looking after her children, she devotes most of her available time to her real passion, which is creating beautifully constructed handicrafts made from bamboo and the leaves of the *Pandanus amaryllifolius* plant or "pandan".

Born and raised in Desa Sejahtera, Ibu Ida would visit her grandmother's house after school to watch her weave hats and floor mats. At a very young age, Ibu Ida discovered artisanal handicrafts and describes her first experiences when she was about four years old, "My grandmother and I were very close, and when I would visit her every day after elementary school it was a natural motivation to learn everything there is to know about her creations."



Ibu Ida (middle, seated) weaves mats with a sustainable livelihoods group.

[Borneo](#)" during July, as Executive Director, Dr. Cheryl Knott, her husband, National Geographic Photographer, Tim Laman, and their children, Russell and Jessica, report on their adventures following wild orangutans in Borneo this summer.

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

~Edmund Burke~

Before she was involved with Yayasan Palung's programs, Ibu Ida visited other villages to meet with artisans in the area to share ideas and learn more about different designs people were creating. By chance, she was told that Yayasan Palung was having an Artisan Group Community Organizer Training meeting that was headed by our Field Coordinator, Wendy Tamariska. On her own, she approached Wendy to see if she could get permission to attend the meeting and she describes her first encounter with him, "It was two years ago that I heard about Yayasan Palung helping artisans to learn how to better sell their products and to develop networks with other groups who sell handicrafts. When I heard about it, I knew that I had to go. When I asked Wendy if I could join, he accepted me with open arms, and we have been friends ever since."

After several training sessions, and further discussions with Wendy, the pair developed a strategy to reach more buyers in the area and beyond by networking with private and government organizations that purchase items in bulk and distribute them to buyers. Wendy also advised her on how to start an artisan community. Since their first encounter, Ibu Ida has become the spokesperson for the Kabupaten Kayung Utara regency artisan groups. She works together with the Ibu Bupati (First Lady of the Regency) who is the Chairwoman of the National Crafts Council (DEKRANASDA) within the region. Goods created by the artisans are sold to the DEKRANASDA, and in turn, they are distributed to buyers all over the nation through expositions held in West Java. Ibu Ida believes that this has been a huge step in the right direction, "Getting involved with the DEKRANASDA has given hope to local artisans that there is a need for their products and that others [appreciate their designs] and craftsmanship."

As Ibu Ida and Yayasan Palung reach more and more villagers, they are empowering them to take control of their future and understand the importance of preserving their pristine forests. According to Ibu Ida, "we need activities that promote non-timber forest products (NTFP), because without it people will cut trees if they don't have money to feed their families." With the formation of artisan groups in villages like Desa Sejahtera, we are strengthening the bond between neighbors and other villages across the KCU Regency. Communities are finding alternative ways to create supplemental income, that in turn helps to preserve the protected areas of the orangutan. Ibu Ida has been instrumental in helping us at Yayasan Palung to reach out to locals and promote a more positive view of the forest.



*Tikar mats, woven by members of the sustainable*

*livelihoods groups, are put out for sale.*

There is additional work that needs to be done in order to increase the profitability of sustainable livelihoods for the artisans. There is still a need to find additional buyers and collaborate with other distributors in Indonesia and the world. Also, local villagers need to network with other artisans in Indonesia by creating their own exhibitions in major cities like Jakarta, or participating in other expositions promoting NTFPs. Ibu Ida hopes that she can continue working together with Yayasan Palung to achieve some of these goals. Next month she, Wendy, and several of our other crafters will be attending a regional weaver's meeting in Pontianak, West Kalimantan, to network with other traditional artisans.

The Alternative Livelihoods Project addresses the fundamental socioeconomic problems that eventually lead to the destruction of the forest. Strengthening the lives of villagers and inspiring communities to coexist with their environment are two of the many goals that Yayasan Palung is pursuing in order to save the rainforest for the orangutans.

## An Intimate Encounter

By Caitlin O'Connell, Graduate Student, Boston University

I stood on the ground below the durian tree, staring up at the two unflanged males, Syklops and Yoda, who were munching on its young golden leaves. Syklops had stopped traveling with the adult female, Bibi, and started following Yoda as he passed them by. The two males then fed quietly alongside one another, with Bibi somewhere far away. Like most orangutan social events, no obvious interaction was taking place. Syklops and Yoda just ate leaves, not acknowledging each other in any way. It was clear why Syklops might follow Bibi around - she was a proven successful mother who might be ready to conceive her next baby, and spending time with her could land Syklops some coveted mating opportunities. But Yoda? All he provided for Syklops was some potential feeding competition over those lame leaves. Why would he leave a female for that? All judgment aside, I took my notes when they fed, when they sat still, and when they resumed feeding.



*Caitlin makes her way through the jungle  
on the search for an orangutan to follow.*

*Photo by Robert Rodriguez Suro*

While this little party might raise interesting larger questions, the details were making me yawn up to this point. But now, Syklops and Yoda were inching closer to one another. There was less than 1 meter between them and they were resting next to each other, looking very relaxed. Then Syklops reached over and touched Yoda gently on his wrist. They inched their bodies even closer together. I had never seen this close proximity between adult males outside of a fight, so I was definitely intrigued. The two males began lightly touching one another's faces. Syklops put his hand to Yoda's mouth and Yoda gently placed his lips to Syklops's fingers. They were lounging on the branch like ancient Roman aristocrats, just gazing at one another. I had seen this kind of behavior in capuchin monkeys, who are famous for their fascinating bond-testing rituals that look an awful lot like this. But male orangutans? I was completely shocked, and completely spellbound, by this sight. I hate to anthropomorphize but the words that come to mind to describe this scene are tender...intimate.

After a few minutes they rested again, but their bodies were still touching as they laid on the same branch. Syklops then did something shocking - he started grooming Yoda. This behavior, which is so commonplace in other primate species, is seen infrequently in orangutans at Gunung Palung, and now I was witnessing two adult males perform this rare ritual. The peace and stillness was suddenly broken by a call of a fellow researcher who was trying to locate me in the forest. The two orangutans were not startled, but they did separate, putting a couple meters between them as if the spell that they were under had suddenly been broken.

Events like this have me utterly captivated by orangutans. They are typically considered semi-solitary, but watching this made me feel certain that they have meaningful relationships that we simply do not get to see every day. This is why I have spent the last year studying these creatures, trying to gain a better understanding of their social structure and organization by detailing their interactions and the circumstances under which they take place. I am a PhD

candidate at Boston University, and Dr. Knott is my advisor. I came to Indonesia to follow orangutans and try to figure out why do we not see events like this on a regular basis. Are they reaping any benefits from associating with one another? Is it risky to spend time together? Perhaps these rare instances of physical contact make them vulnerable to transmitting disease.



*Caitlin works on samples in the lab at Cabang Panti.  
Photo by Robert Rodriguez Suro*

To examine the question of disease transmission, I also collected fecal samples from the orangutans to analyze back at camp using a microscope to detect and photograph parasites. This is the first time that orangutan intestinal parasites have been examined at Gunung Palung, so it was very informative to get an idea of what types of parasites are present in this population. I will also be using this information to compare the parasite profiles among individuals at Gunung Palung to see if there are differences that correlate with social tendencies. I will compare my findings to those from other orangutan study sites to determine if there are meaningful patterns based on differences in sociality, food availability, and other factors.

Waking up at 3:15 in the morning, following orangutans all day, and analyzing samples all evening, made for some very busy days at camp over the last year, but they were also productive. I have a great deal of data to analyze now, and I believe I will have some interesting findings to report. I saw much more social behavior and many more parasites than I anticipated. Whether I was swimming through flooded swamps, making difficult 4 A.M. climbs up the mountain to reach a nest, struggling to keep up with an orangutan through difficult terrain, or hoping an orangutan would get moving after hours in the same tree, this year was full of great memories and experiences. I hope to return to Cabang Panti Research Station again in the not-too-distant future and wish all of my Cabang Panti family the very best!

For more information on the graduate program in Biological Anthropology at Boston University, please visit <http://www.bu.edu/anthrop/graduate/>.

Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program  
(GPOCP)



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