



# Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program



August 2014

Issue: 20

## 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 a feature on Hendri and Muhlis, the two most recent recipients of our Bornean Orangutan Caring Scholarship. This scholarship is part of a collaborative program that binds education, community, and conservation through the funding of higher degrees for local youths. Next, my former student at Boston University, Jennifer Brousseau, reflects on what she learned from spending the past two years in Cabang Panti among the orangutans as first a volunteer and then as the Research Field Manager. Read about her ape encounters as well as the friendships that blossomed between her and members of the local villages.

This newsletter comes to you at the conclusion of my family's blogs on National Geographic's "[Postcards From Borneo](#)", and the last article is available to read online. As always, I am proud to bring you the stories of our community and our staff.

A big thank you to everyone for your continued support of our work.

Sincerely,

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Protect Orangutans!

Postcards From the



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

## Scholarship Recipients Give Back to Yayasan Palung

By Petrus 'Pit' Kanisius and Cassie Freund

For the past month the Yayasan Palung office in Ketapang has been home to two young and eager interns. Our 2013 Bornean Orangutan Caring Scholarship (BOCS) recipients, Hendri Gunawan and Muhammad Muhlis Saputra, have been working with our team on various conservation projects as a part of their scholarship requirement. The BOCS is designed for local students, one from each of the two regencies that GPOCP works in, who are interested in orangutan and forest conservation and who would otherwise be financially unable to attend college. We partner with the Orang Utan Republik Foundation and Orangutan Outreach to provide the winners with tuition costs and all related fees for Tanjungpura University in Pontianak, West Kalimantan. BOCS recipients pass through a lengthy selection process, including an essay and an oral interview, so receiving one of these scholarships is a true achievement!

As part of their scholarship, each student must spend approximately one month each year interning at Yayasan Palung so they can gain real-world experience at a conservation NGO. Hendri and Muhlis have been extremely productive this month, helping the Environmental Education and Conservation Awareness staff plan our World Orangutan Day activities and attending community discussions as part of the Yayasan Palung team.



*Hendri Gunawan*

Hendri Gunawan is 21 years old and originally from Ketapang Regency. His motivation for pursuing the BOCS came from the fact that orangutans, as well as many other animals that are only found in Indonesia, are increasingly threatened. He has been involved in environmental groups since he was young, and believes that higher education will help him contribute to the conservation of Indonesia's forests. In Hendri's words, "My wish is to use my knowledge to educate the communities on the impact of rainforest destruction. I also want them to realize in

## Forest

Follow the last of National Geographic's "[Postcards From Borneo](#)" this month, as Executive Director, Dr. Cheryl Knott, her husband, National Geographic Photographer, Dr. Tim Laman, and their children, Russell and Jessica, report on their adventures following wild orangutans in Borneo this summer.

## Welcome Katherine Scott!

This month we would like to introduce you to our new Research Field Manager, Katherine Scott. Coming to us from the UK, Katherine has previously worked for research and conservation projects in Indonesia and is very excited to get back into the field. Since she has never been to West Kalimantan, her new position is sure to be full of new surprises. Welcome, Katherine!

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their hearts the importance of forest protection." Hendri has decided to join the Department of Law at Tanjungpura University, and after two semesters he is proud to say that thus far his grades have been very high. In his law courses, he'll focus on environmental laws and regulations, especially as they pertain to forest conservation. "As a person who loves the environment, I plan to dedicate my work to law research, specifically for the protection of orangutans according to Indonesia's laws," he says.



*Muhammad Muhlis Saputra (Muhlis)*

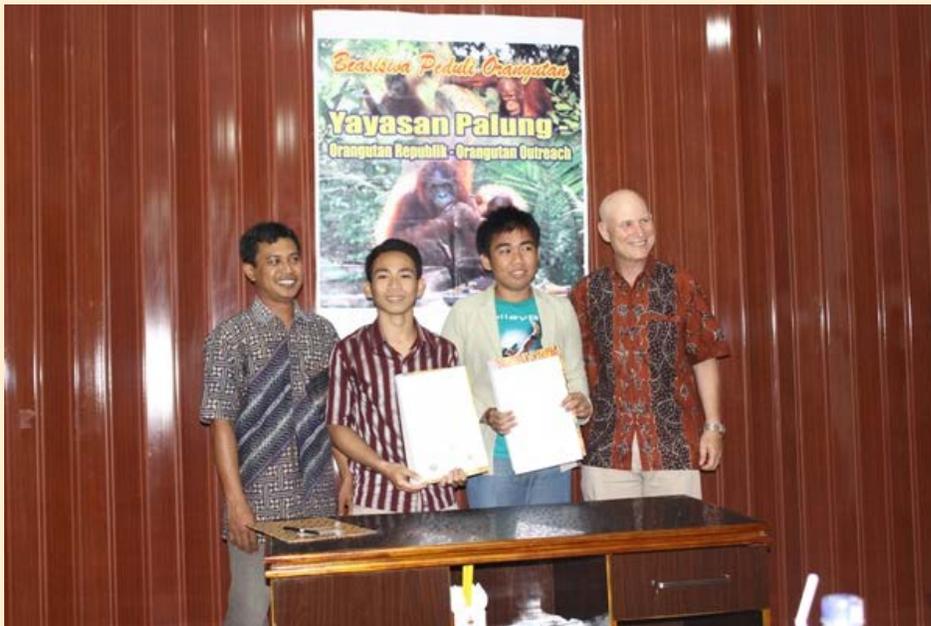
Like Hendri, Muhammad Muhlis Saputra (Muhlis) has also been involved in environmental organizations since he was young. Now 20 years old, he remembers how he first learned about orangutans when he was just eight years old from reading a comic called *Doris and Delima* that was distributed to his classroom by Yayasan Palung staff. The comic is a story about how poaching and the pet trade threatens orangutans and is bad for humans as well. "I was carried away by the story," he says. "Although it was just a small experience, my interest in orangutans and the forest grew as I got older, and when I was in middle school, I joined a nature-lover's club." Now his university major is in the Department of Forestry. Muhlis is active in several university groups, including two religious organizations, serves as a youth mentor, and writes articles about events in his Regency for online media. When asked about his vision for the future of conservation, he explained that he hopes the environment will become more important to the younger generation and that they will help to build a better system of environmental protection in Indonesia. "I'm really committed to finishing my schooling on time, so that I can be more focused on collaborating directly with the communities on conservation efforts. Hopefully everything that I gain from university, and my internship with Yayasan Palung, will benefit this work," he explains.

Aside from the financial assistance of the BOCS, which pays tuition to Tanjungpura University, school fees and textbook costs for the recipients, the scholarship also provides students with the opportunity to gain first-hand experience working in conservation, and as a result they have very well-rounded perspectives on the major issues. In Hendri's words, "My family is from the Tumbang Titi district, which is about 90 km (56 miles) from the city center of Ketapang, and I have memories from my childhood of the forest around my village. The forest was very thick and a habitat for many flora and fauna, such as ulin wood, hornbills and orangutans. But now I am concerned because there are more and more companies that threaten the forest and orangutans with their activities." Hendri's understanding of the economic and social issues driving the expansion of large-scale forest destruction in Indonesia is very insightful. "The problem," he says, "is that the economic needs of villages, coupled with the influx of oil palm plantations and lack of public awareness about the importance of forests and orangutans has led to forest clearing around the small villages. The

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

~Edmund Burke~

low education level of local people and the lure of profits promised by the oil palm companies lead to communities turning over their forest rights. So, it is not only the economy but also a lack of education that contributes to this problem." This month, Hendri and Muhlis have joined Yayasan Palung staff in planning educational and conservation awareness activities to address this specific issue.



*Hendri and Muhlis (center) receive their awards at Yayasan Palung along with Field Director, Tito Indrawan, (left) and Dr. Gary Shapiro, Co-Founder of Orang Utan Republik (right)*

Both Hendri and Muhlis would like to thank everyone who made the scholarship possible. Hendri says, "After receiving the BOCS I truly felt that it made my schooling possible, because my family and I were not capable of paying the expensive tuition. Thank you to all of the people and organizations that have helped me and my friends who needed the scholarship. It has given me the ability to continue into higher education so that I can realize my dreams." Muhlis, echoing Hendri's words, adds that, "I feel very lucky to have received the BOCS, because I come from a family who, without the scholarship, could not pay my school fees. My deep gratitude cannot even be expressed." Both feel that the scholarship has alleviated the financial burden of attending college, freeing them to focus on their studies. They also agree that their internship with Yayasan Palung has built their capacity as future conservation leaders in the area, because they have "worked on many projects, including planning events, writing official letters, and making budgets," all of which are novel experiences that they will use in the future.

When we asked them what message they have for people around the world about conservation and environmental protection, Hendri echoed an adage that many of us are probably familiar with: "After the last tree has been logged, after the last fish has been eaten, and after we drink the last clean water, only then will we realize that we can't eat money!" He urges everyone to value and protect natural areas so that our grandchildren can enjoy the environment and so that animals will still have a place to live freely in their habitats. We at Yayasan Palung are grateful to have such dedicated BOCS students, and we are looking forward to continue working with both Hendri and Muhlis in the future.

## Two Years at Cabang Panti: A Reflection

By Jennifer Brousseau, Former Research Field Manager

As I sit here writing this, lying in a hammock in the middle of the Bornean rainforest, listening to the sounds of the cicadas rehearsing their familiar tune, it hits me again. This place that I have called my home for the past two years, that I have unfortunately begun to take for granted as "the norm", will soon become just a memory in my past. I will no longer have the privilege of watching red leaf monkeys play overhead while I bathe in a pristine river, or just the simple luxury of having a rainforest as your own personal escape from reality. Am I really ready to leave all this behind, to go back to a world of skyscrapers, endless traffic jams, and Taco Bell? Well yes, now that you mention it, a Cheesy Gordita Crunch might be nice. Those family and friends that I have been neglecting over the past two years? It will be amazing to see them too. But how will I cope with no longer waking up to the sounds of gibbons calling in the morning or hearing Codet's bellowing long call through the forest? Will I have to exercise in a real gym now, instead of running around the forest trails of Cabang Panti searching for orangutans? These are just some of the many aspects of Cabang Panti that I will miss tremendously, and they will make it incredibly difficult for me to leave this home behind. It is time for me to move on to whatever may come next. In leaving, I take with me many positive experiences and lessons learned.

As the date of my departure draws closer, most of these "search days", like today, have been days spent thinking and reflecting on my experiences here over the past two years. I have learned more in the past two years than in all four years of college, whether it concerns culture, language, botany, orangutan ecology, relationships with others, or just plain, old me. Immediately upon arriving, I was shocked to find that almost everything that I had previously thought about orangutans was not exactly true, particularly about their sociality and diet. By assigning them the label of "solitary" apes, I had falsely presumed I would never be following them in groups, let alone groups of 6 or 7. I learned that periods of higher sociality are most commonly associated with periods of higher fruit availability in orangutans, and I was very fortunate to arrive a couple of months before a fruit "mast" occurred. During this time period, the orangutans were clustered in a specific area of the trail system, fortunately very close to camp. By simply walking in this area for a few minutes, you could see orangutans in multiple directions, sometimes even six or seven eating together in the same tree. It was amazing to see big flanged males tolerating the presence of multiple mothers and infants, eating and playing together beside them.



*Jenn on one of her many orangutan searches, accompanied by research assistant, Hassan.*

This period of high fruiting also opened up my eyes to the wide array of fruit, leaves, bark, and insects that encompass the orangutan diet. I previously had no knowledge of botany, let alone South East Asian botany, but one of my main jobs when I arrived as a volunteer was to take photos and write descriptions of the fruit and plant species the orangutans would eat on each follow. I became extremely interested in everything and anything to do with the orangutan diet and Southeast Asian botany, information that I never before thought would even enter my brain. I can now tell you the difference between a simple and compound leaf, and why you never want to touch a *Gluta* fruit or taste a sample of *Strychnos*. I am by no means a botanist or an expert on orangutan social behavior. However, I hope that the knowledge I have now amassed, concerning both orangutan diet and behavior, can be utilized in some way in my future.

In terms of human culture, the most eye opening experience during my time in Indonesia would have to be attending a Muslim wedding. A fair warning to any of you hoping to visit Indonesia: it is rude to turn down food, but if you don't eat sparingly at each house you visit during this wedding period, you will easily find yourself ingesting 30,000 calories a day. In this village, I was the only Western attendee at the festivities, but that did not stop everyone from quickly assimilating me into their culture. They stole me away and dressed me in their clothing and a *Hijab* (head scarf) fit for the ceremony. They did not care what religion I followed or where I was from, but were instead so ready and willing to make me feel welcome. My smile almost fell off after those two days from the endless photo sessions with the bride and groom! I can safely say almost every person I have met in Indonesia has been welcoming. Most importantly, everyone I have met has demonstrated such a willingness to understand and accept my cultural norms that I can only hope that this same way of thinking has rubbed off on me. Wherever I end up next, I will aim to embrace this mindset and keep an open mind to accept cultural differences.



*Jenn and two friends attending a wedding in Sukadana.*

The most important lesson I have learned throughout my time here is that life should be spent doing something that you are passionate about. Everything about orangutans was fascinating when I first arrived here, from the way they moved in the trees to even the sheer amount of urine that they can produce at four in the morning. But I can pinpoint one specific experience during my first two months that really enforced this lesson. We had been following our resident male, Codet, who had been in a consortship with an older female named Jumi since the day before. The big event we were hoping for was to observe the pair mating, and I will never forget this day. After all, who can forget observing their first orangutan mating? I will spare you the vivid details, but I was in complete awe of these creatures and felt extremely privileged to be allowed a glimpse into their lives. Since that time, I have observed many matings, fights, and other unique social interactions. Of course, none were as exciting as that "first time." To me, that is when the switch flipped, when this became more than simply a job, but a passion.

Sometimes, I tend to ramble. People who know me best often just want to tell me to get to the point. So talking about Cabang Panti and the lessons and experiences I have shared over the past two years is no exception. I know that living here has been a once in a lifetime experience, and I feel incredibly privileged for having had this opportunity. I owe a lot of gratitude and respect to Dr. Cheryl Knott, without whom, it is hard to say where I would be right now. Looking back upon the experiences I have shared here, it leaves me with such a bittersweet feeling toward the goodbye I will face. I am excited at the prospect of what is to come in the future, but at the same time, how will I cope without my gibbon call alarm clock every morning? Wherever I end up in the next few months or years down the line, I know I can always go back into the old memory archive and remember this place, its people, and my beloved orangutans with the utmost fondness. Who knows, maybe one day I can hope to return to see Codet in action once again, or stuff my face at an Indonesian wedding or two!

Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program  
(GPOCP)



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