



# Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program



September 2014

Issue: 25

## 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 includes a feature on one of the most exciting events of the year: World Orangutan Day! Once a year, the community comes together to celebrate and spread awareness about the endangered orangutan. The day involves parades, costumes, community organizing, and lots of fun, and we can't wait to tell you about it! Next, we revisit my daughter, Jessica Laman's, blog post for the Postcards From Borneo series we did for National Geographic this summer. In it, you can read about her adventures in the rainforest following Walimah, one of our most habituated female orangutans. She really brings to life what it's like to follow wild orangutans through the rainforest of Borneo.

This newsletter comes on the tail of our staff's attendance at the International Primatological Society's annual conference in Hanoi, Vietnam, in August. Six of our staff members, including myself, were able to attend. This conference takes place in a different country every two years and brings together primate researchers and conservationists from across the globe. Researchers share their latest findings and conservationists present information on the plight of endangered primates and the efforts that are being undertaken to save them. I gave a talk entitled, "The Impact of Food Stress on the Hormonal Functioning and Conservation Viability of Wild Bornean Orangutans." In this presentation, I discussed our data that show how changes in

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Welcome, Kat!

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Help us  
Protect Orangutans!

### Welcome Kat!

This month we welcome our new Field Research Manager, Katherine "Kat" Scott, to our team. Kat has a master's degree in Primate Conservation from Oxford

habitat impact the health and reproductive functioning of wild orangutans and how we are working to disseminate this information to the Indonesian public and government decision makers. This was part of an invited symposium that explored how endocrinological research can be used to assist in conservation efforts.



*Cheryl Knott (right) and GPOCP staff at IPS Conference in Hanoi, Vietnam.*

Our staff greatly appreciated the opportunity to learn about the latest research techniques and conservation practices from such a diverse group of international experts. Everyone returned home with new ideas to implement in our own efforts to save Gunung Palung orangutans. We are extremely grateful for the support of the Woodland Park Zoo, the International Primatological Society and Boston University that made our attendance possible.

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

Sincerely,

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

## World Orangutan Day

By Cassie Freund

"Fight orangutan extinction! People need the forest! Save the orangutans, let's live in nature!" Local students and volunteers carrying posters with these phrases and wearing primate masks paraded around a main street in Ketapang city last month. Meanwhile, approximately 50 miles north, a group of high schoolers drew attention by performing a theatrical demonstration on the

Brookes University in England. She has worked on proboscis monkey and orangutan conservation projects in Borneo since 2011. We are excited about the knowledge and expertise that Kat brings to our program and are thrilled that she has chosen to join us.

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 "We should not forget that it will be just as important to our descendants to be prosperous in their time as it is to us to be prosperous in our time."

~Theodore Roosevelt~

plight of the orangutan as they collected hand prints from passers-by as a pledge that these local residents will not hunt or otherwise harm wild orangutans. A few days later, local kindergarten students and their parents gathered at the Bentangor Environmental Education Center to celebrate orangutans through art and song. The occasion? Hari Orangutan Sedunia, or in English, World Orangutan Day! This special day is celebrated each year on August 19th, with the goal of raising worldwide awareness about orangutan and rainforest conservation.

We at GPOCP participated by planning three activities for the communities near Gunung Palung National Park, which reached over 500 people combined.



*Volunteers in primate masks during the World Orangutan Day parade*

Our street demonstration in Ketapang was a rousing success, with over 400 participants from local schools, our Ketapang-based volunteer group, and government agencies. The Ketapang Forestry Department donated 600 seedlings that GPOCP staff and students distributed to passing motorists and participants. Volunteers designed and carried posters with conservation slogans, wore orangutan masks, and chanted and cheered loudly to show their support for orangutans as they walked down one of the main roads in Ketapang. The event was even supported by local police, who came to help with event safety and quickly joined the enthusiastic crowd. "We hope that government agencies, schools and communities tackle the problem of threats to orangutans and their habitat more intensively," explained GPOCP Conservation Awareness Field Officer, Bedu Nugros.





*Many volunteers carried posters to raise awareness for orangutan conservation.*

Not to be outdone, our Kayong Utara-based volunteer youth group planned a theatrical demonstration in the middle of Sukadana, a small town in the foothills of Gunung Palung. Their performance showed how orangutans are protected under Indonesian law and explained the consequences of poaching or hunting orangutans and other wildlife. About 60 high school students participated in the demonstration, donating their time and energy to the orangutan conservation cause! After the street performance, the students collected more handprints from the local community on a large banner as a visual signal of the community's commitment to protect orangutans. Local residents were enthusiastic about the event, as many were previously unaware of World Orangutan Day and inspired by the youth movement.



*A community member adds a handprint to the youth group's poster.*

Our final event took place at GPOCP's Bentangor Environmental Education Center in Pampang Harapan village on August 23rd. We invited 20 kindergarten students and their families from the surrounding community, along with 12 local high school students from six different schools, for a day of conservation-themed art. The day began with a showing of a short orangutan-themed film called "Gunung Palung is My Palace", after which the two groups of students split off. The kindergarteners sprawled out with their crayons and pencils to color pictures that we provided and enjoy time with their families. Meanwhile, the high schoolers, who had each been given time in advance to prepare an orangutan conservation comic book, put the finishing touches on their work. Three judges examined and scored each comic book based on artistic merit, the overall conservation message, and the outcome of a short oral presentation by each student. Choosing a winner proved very difficult as all of the entries were quite good, but after about 15 minutes of deliberation we had a champion! The first, second and third place artists were given trophies and school backpacks, with each entrant receiving a certificate of achievement. The first place comic book, titled "When Will I Be Free?" will also be published and distributed to local school children as part of our Conservation Awareness program.



*A young girl colors a picture of an orangutan as part of the day's activities.*

It was wonderful to witness such enormous community support during World Orangutan Day. Far and wide, the people of Ketapang and Sukadana proved how much they care about the forests and animals that surround them. We can't wait to see these attitudes translate into action in the coming years!

## Postcards From Borneo: Chasing Orangutans

By Jessica Laman

My boot slips in the mud as I chase down the hill after the orangutan. I duck under thorny rattan vines as I scramble over roots and rocks that jut out of the earth in the most unexpected places. We are chasing after a young female orangutan named Walimah as she charges down the steep slope. We are in Borneo at my mom's research site where she studies wild orangutans and my dad photographs them for National Geographic.





*Cheryl and Jessica use binoculars to get a closer look at the orangutan they are following.*

The field assistants who work for my mom following orangutans have to get up at three in the morning to get to the orangutans before they wake up. The orangutans sleep in nests that they build every night out of leaves and branches up in the trees. Even though I love to follow the orangutans, I'm glad that we don't have to stay out from before dawn till after dusk when they go to sleep. They are really cool animals and it's funny when you see them behave in a way that is so similar to humans, like when they make 'umbrellas' out of clumps of leaves even though they probably keep less than two percent of the rain off.



Walimah, one of the female orangutans at Cabang Panti

But now, I'm slipping and sliding over the slick wet leaves, I grab small trees around me to

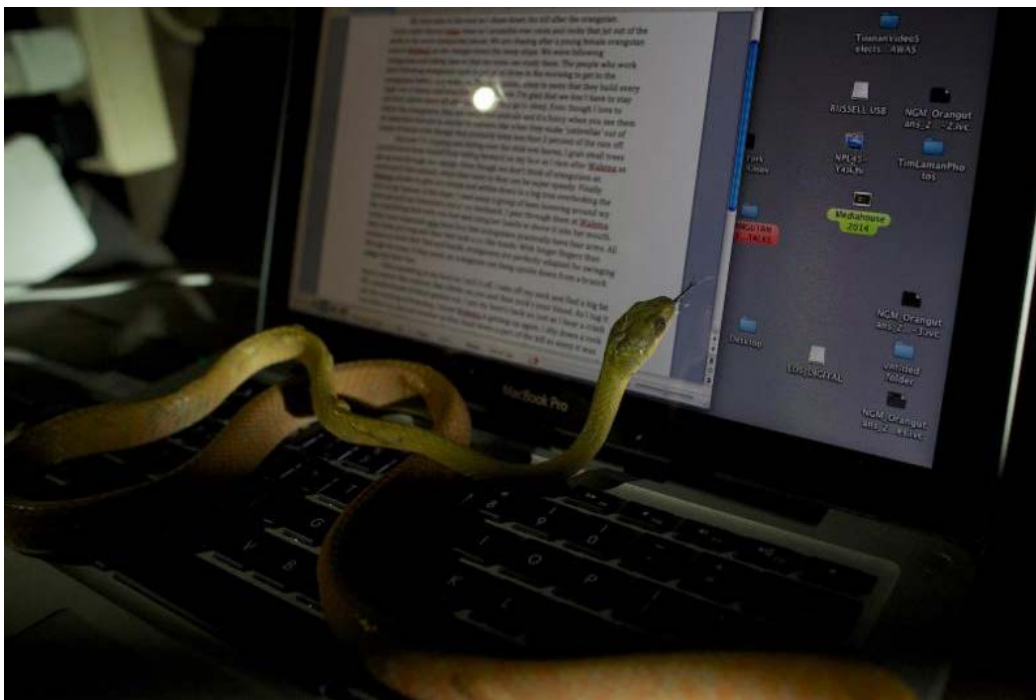
keep myself from falling forward on my face as I race after Walimah as she sprints through the canopy. Even though we don't think of orangutans as particularly fast animals, when they want to they can be super speedy. Finally, Walimah decides to give us a break and settles down in a big tree overlooking the river at the bottom of the slope. I swat away a group of bees hovering around my head and pull my binoculars out of my backpack. I peer through them at Walimah. She is grabbing food with one foot and using her hands to shove it into her mouth. Unlike most mammals who have four feet, orangutans practically have four arms. All their limbs are long and their feet look a lot like hands. With longer fingers than humans on both their feet and hands, orangutans are perfectly adapted for swinging through the trees. If they want, an orangutan can hang upside down from a branch using only their feet.



*Jessica and Russell imitate orangutans by climbing vines in the forest.*

I feel something in my boot so I pull it off, I take off my sock and find a big fat leech, a worm-like creature that climbs on you and then suck's your blood. As I tug it off, a small stream of blood gushes out. I put my boot back on just as I hear a crash and the cracking of branches. I know Walimah is getting up again. I slip down a rock and follow my dad and brother, Russell, as they head down a part of the hill so steep it is practically a cliff. The next time she stops, it's right over our favorite swimming hole, Big Rock. Walimah starts eating so that the peels of her fruit fall into the water. Unable to avoid temptation, my brother and I jump in. The water is fresh and cool and clean. Actually up here at camp the water is so clean that we drink straight from the river. I dunk under and swim along the rocky bottom.





*A non-poisonous snake investigates the quality of Jessica's blog post.*

It's great to be a kid at Gunung Palung. I'm only ten and going into fifth grade, and this is my fifth time coming to the research site. I love visiting camp. It's so different than back home in Massachusetts. Here in Borneo unexpected things are always popping up, things you never could have predicted. For example, as I finish writing this a snake has just started slithering behind the computer. And now dad is telling Russell to steer it with a radio antenna so it will go into the right place for a picture.

Get extra video content of Jessica explaining how leeches feed on National Geographic's [Postcards From Borneo post](#).

Read our other Postcards from Borneo blogs here: [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), and [5](#).

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(GPOCP)



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