



# Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program



April 2015

Issue: 28

## Code RED

An e-newsletter from your friends in West Borneo

Dear Friends and Supporters,

April has been a busy, but exciting, month here at our site in West Kalimantan. The research team followed Walimah and her young baby almost non-stop, collecting valuable information on infant development and observing how Walimah is adapting to new motherhood. They were joined by a small team of photographers, led by Tim Laman, who were there to document the first months of our newest orangutan's life. We'll be sharing more information about this in a later edition of Code RED. This month we want to share an exciting account of an orangutan "party" from earlier this year. Research Manager, Kat Scott, tells the story of how a seemingly routine follow of one individual became a day of tracking seven orangutans around the forest!

This month GPOCP's conservation team hosted the 4th Annual Weaver Meeting, a gathering of traditional artisans from across Kalimantan. This was an important event for our Sustainable

### In This Issue:

Orangutans Like to Party!

-

Crafting for Kalimantan's Future

-

Follow Tim Laman's Trip to GP

-


Best Wishes, Rusda!

Follow Tim Laman's Trip to GP

Livelihoods program and was a huge success, with over 80 artisans, NGO representatives, and government officials joining in the festivities. Read more about it in this month's second article.

As always, we thank you for your continued support of our work to study and conserve Gunung Palung's Bornean orangutan population.

Sincerely,



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

## Orangutans Like to Party!

By Kat Scott, Research Manager

When I first came to Cabang Panti I had heard legendary tales of up to 8 orangutans seen feeding together in the same tree, sharing food, playing and sometimes even mating. These meetings, termed 'parties' by primatologists, were a regular occurrence according to the team. However, after two months in the field, I was skeptical as it seemed that we only had two orangutans in the whole of Cabang Panti-Walimah and Codet. We followed them day in and day out for eight weeks, generally growing slightly bored of following the same focal animals. Occasionally an anomaly would pop up in the form of another orangutan, but it was generally short-lived, as they appeared, ate and left within the space of two days.



Walimah (left) parties with an unidentified adult female. Bornean orangutans socialize less than their Sumatran counterparts, and witnessing play behavior like this is a rare opportunity.

For those interested in seeing the photos from Tim Laman and his National Geographic team's latest trip to Gunung Palung, check out [@timlaman](#) and [@savegorangutans](#) on Instagram, and don't forget to "Like" our Facebook page! We'll be posting and sharing Tim's photos as they are released and are looking forward to seeing some great pictures of Walimah and her baby.

## Best Wishes, Rusda!

This month, Rusda Yakin, who has been part of the research team for the past two years, returned to Jakarta to be closer to his family. Rusda has been an integral part of the team, assisting with all aspects of the project, especially identifying and processing our botanical samples. We'd like to thank him for all of his hard work over the years and wish him the best of luck in his next position.

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Alas, Christmas came and our Boxing Day special (for our American friends this is the day after Christmas in the UK) was, of course, Codet. As the Research Manager it is my job to assist with keeping camp running, but also to boost morale among the team. This was growing pretty difficult, as despite our vast searching days, we were turning up no one but the same two animals. Don't get me wrong, orangutans in any form are awesome, but for two months solid, in a forest containing approximately 2,500 orangutans, this was getting a little bit old! Even on days when we weren't following Codet, he appeared from seemingly nowhere. Once he even long called from several meters above where I was taking a break on the trail.

One day in January, Becki and I went out to Walimah's nest early in the morning. The assistants had just finished a five-day follow of her, but we needed some new photos for the database and so planned to spend a leisurely few hours observing her. Around 6:00 am the rustling above us indicated Walimah was awake and raring to go. She moved a little and stationed herself on a branch, offering us a good vantage point while she rested. We heard the trees moving in the distance, but ignored the sound, as we figured it was gibbons or a squirrel. Then, the noises came closer and we saw a flash of orange. Due to our isolated location, we figured it was a red langur doing its own thing. Since Walimah had been pregnant she'd been very unsociable and avoided contact with other orangutans.

However, as both we and Walimah turned our heads in the direction of the mysterious noisemaker, we discovered it was another orangutan! I was more than a little bit excited as I had not yet seen Walimah exhibit any social behavior. The intruder was a new adolescent female whom it seemed wasn't aware that a large rotund orangutan would be blocking her path that morning. The new female turned around and headed back in the direction from which she had come, and in a split second we decided to abandon Walimah and run after this new female.

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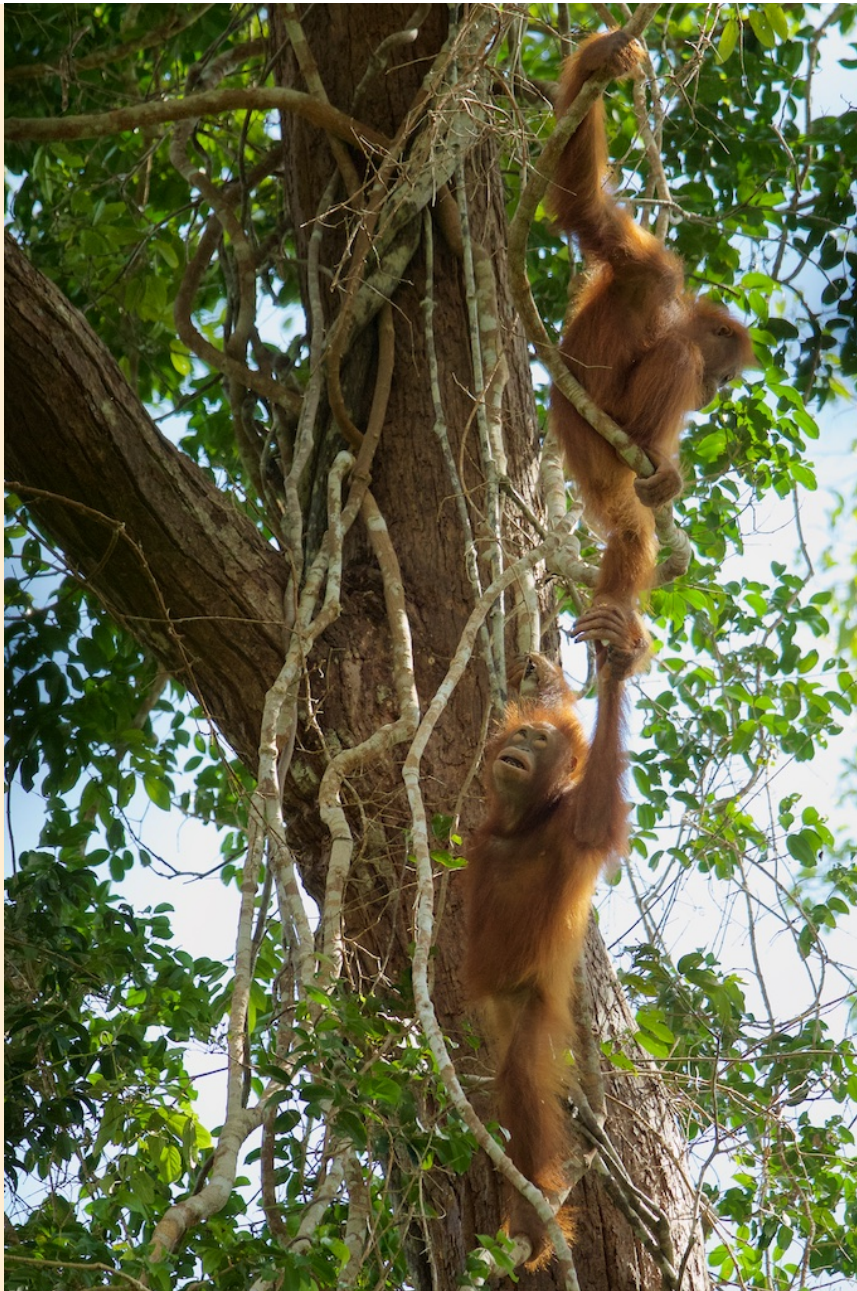


Forward to a Friend

"Nature does not hurry, but everything gets accomplished."

-Lao Tzu-





Young orangutans, Betsy and Dinda, use this vine-covered tree as a jungle gym and party spot.

The female took us to a large *Lithocarpus* tree (producing fruit like giant acorns), where we soon met another orangutan... and then another. These individuals turned out to be a mother/infant pair named Hera and Harmoni. Prior to this particular January day, the two had not been seen since 2010, so this in itself was pretty awesome and we tried to take a lot of photos of them. Hera was obviously not amused by the adolescent female that we had been following and promptly chased her away, forcing us to switch focal animals. By then it was about 7:30 am and we knew that the assistants were soon coming out to search, so I contacted them and gave them our location. Hera and Harmoni weren't bothered by us at all and took us to a large *Neesia* tree. *Neesia* is a large, very heavy fruit that the orangutans love. The fruit itself is shaped like a missile (dangerous if dropped from above!) and the inside is lined with thousands of tiny hairs, which fly everywhere and itch like crazy if they touch your skin. In other

sites in Indonesia orangutans have been known to use tools to break into these fruits (you can download Dr. Knott's paper about this topic [here](#)), but our orangutans just seem to use their teeth! Needless to say, following orangutans who are eating *Neesia* is pretty precarious and requires careful attention.



*Neesia* fruits are large, heavy, and have tiny sharp irritating hairs that fly everywhere when the fruit is opened. However, the orangutans love it!

From behind us, I heard the sound of the rest of the team approaching and I looked back to greet them. Hardi, one of the assistants who was first on the scene, asked which orangutan they should follow. "Well, obviously the mother-infant," I replied. "Yes, but which one?" asked Hardi. At first I was wondering why he asked that, since we were only following Hera and Harmoni, but then I looked up again and realized that we had accidentally stumbled across what can only be termed an orangutan feeding frenzy. Not only were Hera and Harmoni there, but there was also a mother-infant-juvenile group as well: five orangutans in total! I was totally bemused by the whole situation and couldn't quite work out how it had happened.

At this point the *Neesia* hairs were flying everywhere, so we took cover and tried to decide which orangutans to follow. Eventually we settled on the mother-infant-juvenile group and Toto and I moved off with them. Becki called over to say that she was with our intended focal animals and we headed in her direction. That's when I saw a mother with a tiny infant cross the river. When I called Becki to check that she still had the animals, she replied that she did, and that's when Toto realized that yet another two orangutans had stealthily made their way into our party. Now we had seven orangutans, five of which we believed to be new to the project, and confusion reigned as we tried to work out which animals were which. Luckily only one of the females had both a newborn and a juvenile in tow, so that made it easier to figure out who our focal individuals were.





*Adult female, Umi, and her juvenile, Uok, share a "touching" moment*

Little-by-little the orangutan party fizzled out and dispersed, and we were left with just three orangutans, having changed multiple animals over the course of just two hours. We managed to follow these orangutans, who we later discovered were Tari, Telur and Tari's new baby, Tawni, for five full days afterwards. They 'partied' a few times over those follow days with other orangutans, and I am hoping this is a sign of things to come at Cabang Panti this year. We have no idea what Walimah made of the whole situation, but for me it was one of the best experiences of my time here so far, and I hope I get the opportunity to experience many more parties like the one in January.

## **Crafting for Kalimantan's Future**

By Cassie Freund, Program Director

Last weekend, GPOCP's Sustainable Livelihoods team welcomed over 80 traditional artisans and supporters from across Indonesia for the 4th annual Weaver Meeting, a yearly activity for members of the Craft Kalimantan network. Craft Kalimantan is a consortium of six non-profit organizations that work together to promote traditional handicrafting and to conserve the natural materials that talented artisans across Kalimantan use to create craft products. GPOCP works directly with four groups of local artisans living in the Gunung Palung National Park buffer zone, with the goal of helping artisans secure additional income from sustainable activities so that they no longer need to encroach into the Park to obtain the resources they need to support their families.



*Some of the Weaver Meeting participants, wearing traditional clothing as part of the celebration.*

This was the first time that GPOCP had hosted this meeting. Participants came from Yayasan Riak Bumi, NTFP-EP Indonesia, Yayasan Dian Tama, JMM Cooperation and GPOCP. The crafters all gathered in Sukadana with the goal of learning new skills and networking with each other. This year was also the first year that YAPUDA, a Papuan community development organization, participated in the event, which was very exciting for us. Finally, several artisans from the nearby villages of Sedahan Jaya and Tanjung Gunung attended, along with craftswomen from a remote area to the northeast of Gunung Palung National Park. The Weaver Meeting, which lasted two full days, included presentations for the artisans by GPOCP, Craft Kalimantan, the Kayong Utara regency Department of Tourism, and the Gunung Palung National Park Office, as well as long training sessions during which artisans taught each other their favorite crafts and how to weave with a variety of different plant materials. We ended the two-day meeting with a field trip to several important places around Sukadana, including a small gallery where crafts made by the GPOCP artisans are sold and some scenic spots near the National Park and on the beach.



*Artisans from across Indonesia participated in the Weaver Meeting,*



*which included several training sessions to help increase the quality and variety of products that these crafters make.*

My favorite part of the meeting was that all of the participants brought some of their handmade products to sell. There were bamboo baskets with intricate Dayak motifs, bracelets and earrings made of *pandan* and *rotan* (types of rainforest plants), cups made of carved coconut shells, and hand-dyed woven cloth with patterns from both West and East Kalimantan. I bought three things and probably could have purchased several more! We invited some of the staff from ASRI, another conservation NGO in Sukadana, to come and shop as well and they were all blown away by the variety and quality of products that the participants had made. This is important because the more people that know about these handicrafts, the bigger the market will grow and the more incentive that the artisans will have to not only keep their traditions and culture alive, but also to protect the forest and the orangutans that live in it. Overall the 4th annual Weaver Meeting was a huge success and we're looking forward to continually strengthening our ties with Craft Kalimantan in the future.



*Products from across Kalimantan, including local hand-crafted baskets and teapots, on display at the Weaver Meeting.*



Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program (GPOCP)

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