

# Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program



November 2015

Issue: 35

## Code RED

An e-newsletter from your friends in West Borneo

Dear Friends and Supporters,

We're happy to say that the rains have arrived in Kalimantan, and the forest fires have stopped! See the sidebar for more information on Indonesia's current efforts to ensure that this disaster never happens again.

This month we participated in several meaningful events as we marked Orangutan Caring Week (November 8-15th). Our conservation team was in the field for much of it, visiting the Sandai district of Ketapang regency for a week of environmental education work. Read about our amazing community event in the first article below! Not to be outdone, the research team decided to share on social media some of their favorite orangutan follow moments, making life in the forest come alive for our Facebook and Instagram followers. Check out their stories in the second

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article.

I was also asked to participate in an "Ask me Anything" forum on the very popular internet site "Reddit." It was fun to see all the questions that people had about orangutans and to share my expertise with this wide internet community.

Finally, as the holidays approach, if you're an Amazon shopper be sure to log in using smile.amazon.com and select the "Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program" under the search bar. Amazon contributes 0.05% of the proceeds from each purchase to us. This really adds up at this time of year!

Sincerely,



Cheryl Knott, Executive Director

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

## #Sandai4Orangutan

*By Petrus Kanisius, GPOCP Environmental Education Officer*

Earlier this month, on November 15th, we held our annual Orangutan Caring Week celebration. This year was a first in that we were in Sandai, a district that directly borders the eastern side of Gunung Palung National Park. Because the trip to Sandai requires a long, five-hour car ride over muddy back roads, the GPOCP Environmental Education team decided to spend all of Orangutan Caring Week visiting schools and community groups in two villages near the National Park. On the last day of Caring Week, known in Bahasa Indonesia as Pekan Peduli Orangutan, we held a "family fun day" at Sandai High School (SMAN 1), in the district's largest town. Throughout the week, we promoted the theme "Sandai for Orangutan," to get people excited about taking ownership over orangutan conservation.

## Dr. Cheryl Knott on Reddit

GPOCP Executive Director,

Dr. Cheryl Knott, was recently featured on Reddit's Science "Ask Me Anything"

series to discuss her research into the reproductive physiology of wild orangutans and GPOCP's conservation work. There were lots of great questions from the Reddit community. [Read the](#)

[full discussion here](#), we guarantee you'll learn

something new!

## Forest Fires Update

The beginning of November brought desperately-needed rain to Kalimantan, and we can breathe more easily.

Most of the forest fires have been put out, at least temporarily. With another dry spell predicted for February, we will remain alert for new fire outbreaks.

Notably, Indonesia has begun to take political action to prevent disasters like this from happening again in the



*This is what Orangutan Caring Week is all about: raising awareness about conservation and getting people excited to participate! Photo credit: Sandai Photographer's Club*

We opened the morning at 7:00 am with the ever popular Indonesian activity of *senam*, or group aerobics, set to energizing techno music. This proved a fun way to attract a large crowd of about 400 students and community members, and got them engaged with our activities right away. Two of GPOCP's educators, Ranti Naruri and Edward Tang, even got up on stage with the instructor! After that, we hosted a puppet show class with a group of local school kids and gave them the chance to perform on stage. Some local musical talent joined in for a few rounds of GPOCP's original song, "Si Pongo," and the whole crowd sang along while the students performed with the puppets.



*Time for senam! We got the morning started right with a bit of exercise*

future, by [strengthening peatland management](#) and environmental regulations. We hope that this trend will continue into the future and that people and orangutans will never have to suffer through another haze crisis.

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"Earth was created for all of us, not some of us."

-Anthony Douglas Williams-



*before launching into our orangutan-themed activities.*

Throughout the morning, we had several stations set up where participants could create their own conservation campaign messages and get their photos taken. Plenty of selfies were taken as well, and we asked people to post their favorite photos to social media using the hashtag #Sandai4Orangutan. The highlight of the day, however, was our tree painting activity, where we asked all of the participants to declare their commitment to orangutan conservation by adding leaves, symbolized by handprints, onto a tree banner that we had created especially for Orangutan Caring Week. The banner was donated to SMAN 1, where it will become a permanent display.



*Students proudly show off their hands after adding their prints to our Orangutan Caring Week tree banner.*

All of us at GPOCP were thrilled with the huge number of people who came out to celebrate Orangutan Caring Week, and although it had been a busy week full of school visits, film showings, and community meetings, we were re-energized by the crowd's enthusiasm. The local schools, especially SMAN 1, were very hospitable and receptive to our conservation work. The high school principal, Mr. Dian Natalis, was especially happy because, "the Orangutan Caring Week activities increased our students' knowledge and awareness about the status of protected animals, like the orangutan, and our environment." He continued by saying that he plans to host an activity like ours every year from now on! The students agreed with his statements, adding that the day was exciting, and something that they'd never experienced before. They especially enjoyed learning new things about orangutans and having the opportunity get involved by creating their own campaign messages.



*Students from SMAN 1 Sandai share their campaign messages during our #Sandai4Orangutan event.*

It's safe to say that this year's Orangutan Caring Week was a success, and we can't wait to do it again next year!

## **Feature: Favorite Orangutan Follow Moments**

*By GPOCP Researchers*

Over the past 23 years, GPOCP researchers have spent over 70,000 hours studying wild orangutans. No two follows are ever the same, which makes for many exciting moments. In honor of Orangutan Caring Week this year, the current research team wrote up their favorite follow moments to be shared on our Facebook and Instagram pages. In case you missed it, here they are!

**Agus Trianto, Botanical Assistant:** "In the early morning one day I saw a shadow in the top of a tree moving and it made a sound which I hadn't heard before. Then I knew it was a long call from Codet, a flanged adult male. It was a little scary at first but really amazing to hear up close for the first time."



*Caitlin O'Connell observed feeding tolerance and social play among a group of GP orangutans. These moments are rarer than with other, more social, great apes. Photo by Caitlin O'Connell.*

**Caitlin O'Connell, Ph.D. Researcher:** "On my final day of data collection for my dissertation, I witnessed a social party of 6 orangutans that involved multiple mating events, feeding tolerance, social play, and a major fight between Bilbo and Malik (two unflanged males)! It was the ultimate parting gift from the orangutans of Gunung Palung, emphasizing one of the big take home points from my year observing them - orangutans have far more interesting social lives than we typically give them credit for."

**Wahyu Susanto, Research Director:** "In 2009 we were following a mother and juvenile pair named Irma and Ijal, and they ate fruit from a *Chaetocarpus castanocarpus* tree. We didn't know that the fruits had very fine thorns on the outside, and that in order to eat them the orangutans had to get rid of the thorns by rubbing the fruit on the tree trunk. We were taking data like usual, but before long all of us felt itchy and painful. We realized that there were many tiny thorns from the fruits stuck in our clothes! Since then we are all more careful when orangutans eat the *Chaetocarpus* fruit, and sometimes we even have to temporarily take off our shirts so we aren't itchy all day."

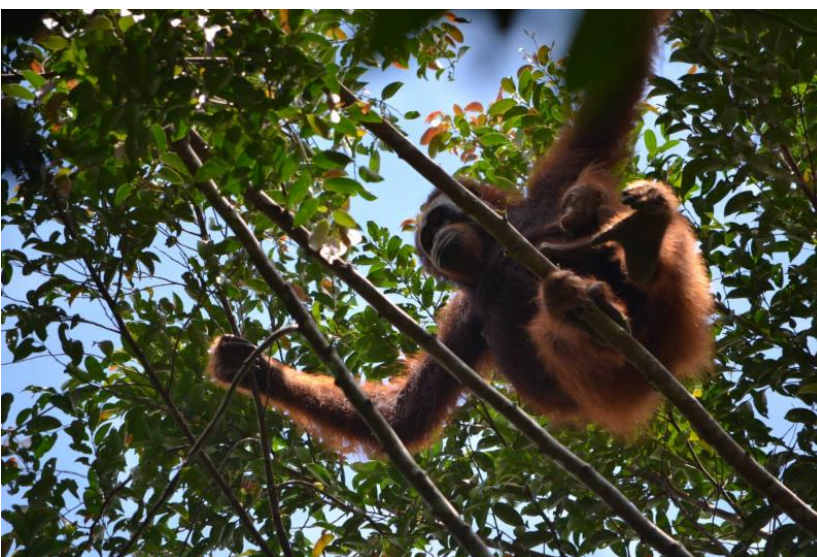




*Wahyu (far right) and a group of assistants observe Irma and Ijal as they eat *Chetocarpus* fruit (inset). Do you notice anything amiss?*

**Andrea DiGiorgio, Ph.D. Researcher:** "I was out on a follow with Hassan and Toto and we were following Ned. Ned was kiss squeaking and throwing things at us and I remember at one point Hassan put his hand on a liana and blocked us from going forward. Hassan didn't say anything but Ned calmed down, and I was really impressed with how he understood the animal we were following and his knowledge of how to work with them and not alter their behavior."

**Kat Scott, Research Manager:** "I have had lots of interesting follows, but one of my favorites was when I met this new mother-infant pair in Cabang Panti, and snapped this photo. Finding a new infant is always exciting, and this day was extra special because I was able to spend a few hours just peacefully following them through the forest."



*Kat Scott found and followed this mother-infant pair as they moved serenely through the trees. Photo by Kat Scott.*

**Katie Lauck, Research Assistant:** "Pak Bacong (who occasionally helps us in the field) stopped my progress through the jungle with the alarmed whisper, "Ada orangutan!" (There's an orangutan!). I wheeled around,

adrenaline already pumping, and saw an enormous flame-furred flanged male crouched in the underbrush with his back to us. We were still several paces back and the male hadn't see us, so I turned to Pak Bacong to gesture to get a bit closer. When I looked to my right, though, there was an empty space where Pak Bacong was standing - turns out he'd sprinted right back the way we'd came!"

**Tim Laman, GP Researcher and Wildlife Photojournalist:**

"A forest durian tree was fruiting and I climbed a nearby tree and made a small platform to wait for any orangutans to come and feed. It was a long wait, and I saw several field assistants who just "happened" to pass by come and check the ground for durians to eat (I had a good laugh because they didn't know I was up in the tree watching them). But finally, the big flanged male came. He saw me in the nearby tree, but didn't care. He stayed three hours and ate 13 whole durians, including the seeds. I got many photos, including this one."



*This flanged male probably set a record for the number of durians eaten in one "sitting"! Photo © Tim Laman.*

Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program (GPOCP)

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