

# Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program



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## Code RED

An e-newsletter from your friends in West Kalimantan

Dear Friends and Supporters,

It's hard to believe that we're already two full months into 2016! This month, we bring you an update on our Sustainable Livelihoods program, which has developed greatly over the past several months. We also welcome our newest volunteer research assistant, Rinaldi Gotama, who is originally from the Indonesian capital of Jakarta and is studying Biological Sciences at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology.

It's also been a productive month in terms of building local research capacity, as we welcomed nine students from the Pontianak-based Universitas Tanjungpura at Cabang Panti Research Station. They came for a brief visit to pilot their potential undergraduate thesis research projects, and we hope to host them again in the future.

Finally, I'd like to congratulate Wildlife Photojournalist (and my husband!) Tim Laman on his first-place finish in the World Press Photo - Nature Stories competition, with his portfolio titled "Tough Times for Orangutans." To learn more and see the full portfolio, check out the sidebar!

Thanks to you all for your continued support of our work!

Sincerely,

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**Tough Times for  
Orangutans**

Cheryl Knott

Cheryl Knott, Executive Director

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

## From Environmentally Destructive to Orangutan Friendly: An Update on our Sustainable Livelihoods Program

*By Cassie Freund, GPOCP Program Director*

Finding steady work and earning enough income to support a family remains a very real challenge to many of the communities living around Gunung Palung. Most adults are undereducated and there are very few employment options for them in the villages. It is no surprise, then, that people turn to environmentally destructive livelihoods, such as illegal logging and harvesting wildlife, to make ends meet. In 2009 GPOCP established our Sustainable Livelihoods Program to address this issue, and for the past six years we have been working closely with communities and local government to help people adopt "forest-friendly" livelihood options, thus reducing their dependence on economic activities that exploit the environment. Our current program consists of three strategies: 1) Supporting our Non-Timber Forest Product (NTFP) artisan groups; 2) Helping farmers adopt organic methods and increase the efficiency of their existing land; and 3) Teaching community groups to set up aquaculture (fish farming) in their villages.



*By helping people adopt new, sustainable livelihoods, we can protect orangutans and other rainforest biodiversity in and around Gunung Palung National Park. Photo © Tim Laman.*

2015 was a stellar year for our NTFP artisan groups. We started the year with four groups, representing four different buffer zone villages, and ended it with five! The new group, which consists mainly of young people, formed entirely organically and without any impetus from GPOCP. This is an encouraging example of community conservation in action and shows that our methods are replicable. Another success story from 2015 is that of

Congratulations to wildlife photojournalist, Tim Laman, on his latest international photography award. His portfolio, titled "Tough Times for Orangutans," was awarded first prize in the World Press Photo Awards - Nature Stories category. This is a culmination of many years of collaboration with his wife, GPOCP Executive Director, Dr. Cheryl Knott.

Tim's photo of a male orangutan climbing to the top of a towering tree in Gunung Palung National Park (below) not only awed the judges, but has captured the attention of hundreds of thousands of people on social media. View the entire portfolio [here!](#)



## GPOCP Presents at Hornbill Trafficking Conference

This month, GPOCP Animal and Habitat Protection Manager, Edi Rahman, was invited to present at a workshop titled *Trafficking the Helmeted Hornbill in West Kalimantan*, sponsored by Rangkong Indonesia. The helmeted hornbill, recently upgraded to Critically Endangered by the IUCN, is one of the most trafficked birds in Kalimantan. They

Ibu Vina, a local woman from Sejahtera village and member of the new artisan group. She previously earned income from harvesting rocks and sand from inside of the National Park to sell to construction companies. However, she has now completely stopped that work and dedicates her time to weaving jewelry and *tikar* mats from readily available forest materials. This year our artisans sold 949 products, earning about \$4,000 total, a significant increase from 2014's sales. They have also been formally recognized as community leaders by the local government, and in March they will sign a formal, public commitment to conserve and protect Gunung Palung National Park.



*Customers from Kayong Utara regency visit our NTFP artisan's booth at a festival in December.*

Our organic farming work remains focused on Pampang Harapan village, where our Bentangor Environmental Education Center is based. The majority of Pampang citizens are farmers, and they traditionally have cleared land inside of the Park. We continue to work with them to show them methods and ways to take advantage of the land they already have. In 2016 we aim to integrate the livelihoods work into our [Customary Forest Initiative](#), and as a trial run we held an organic agriculture training in Padu Banjar village earlier this year, which was a huge hit. Participants learned to make organic compost and pesticides from household materials and kitchen waste, and it was so well received that we have now integrated this into our routine activities. In the coming months we aim to train four more villages on these methods.

are known for their casques, [which can be carved into expensive souvenirs](#). Edi's presentation, given in conjunction with the Gunung Palung National Park Authority, highlighted several cases of hornbill trading that GPOCP has investigated in the past, and discussed the future prospects for the Gunung Palung population if poaching is allowed to continue.



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*"We never know the worth of water, until the well is dry."*

*-Thomas Fuller-*



*GPOCP Sustainable Livelihoods Field Officer, Pak Asbandi, teaches high school students from Sukadana how to make organic compost.*

Finally, this year we initiated aquaculture/fish farming products in the local villages of Pampang and Tanjung Gunung. Creating fish ponds requires relatively little input, just a few tarps and fish food, and has thus proven a productive livelihood method. Our initial group of five trainees has already completed their first harvest of 100 fish each, and they plan to use the income from that to purchase 200 fry (baby fish), thus continuing the cycle. They have also reported that some of their neighbors are now interested in learning how to start their own fish farming business! We are optimistic that aquaculture will be a popular livelihood activity, and because fish is a staple of the Indonesian diet, there is consistent demand for the product. This is important because in the past with other livelihood options, for example selling NTFP products, finding easily accessible markets has been a challenge.



*Trainee fish farmers in Tanjung Gunung village check on their pond. This simple set up can be built in just a few hours from wood, nails, and a tarp. Just add baby fish!*

team, and we're looking forward to seeing what successes this year brings. A huge thank you to all of the donors that have and continue to sponsor this work! By finding forest-friendly livelihood options for local communities, we can protect the wild orangutans of Gunung Palung National Park in 2016 and beyond.

## Green is the New Black

*By Rinaldi Gotama, Research Assistant*

Three weeks ago I arrived at Cabang Panti Research Station in Gunung Palung National Park. Growing up in Jakarta and going to university in the large metropolitan city of Hong Kong, I had been surrounded by a concrete jungle my entire life. Living in the middle of a rainforest had always been just a dream, and I couldn't believe that I finally had an opportunity to spend six months as a volunteer orangutan research assistant. Looking back, it has been a sweet and humbling journey, and one that I could not have achieved if I hadn't decided to risk taking a semester off from my university life.



*The beginning of the walk into the field station, now a stark reminder of the devastating impacts of the 2015 fire season.*

*Photo © Rinaldi Gotama*

I arrived at Cabang Panti on the 14th of January, completely wet and exhausted after a five hour walk from a nearby village. On the way to camp, I walked through a burnt area that used to be a forest. There was no standing, living tree in the area - it was now a charcoal-black, muddy swamp with little hints of the green ferns that spring up at the beginning of secondary succession. The sky was painted with perfect blue, but it couldn't lift me up from the sadness I felt looking at scenery this depressing. The fire that scorched this land stopped months ago, yet I could still feel the stinging burn on my legs, like it just happened yesterday. It astounded me that this happens every year, and nothing much has been done to stop this from going on. I walked deeper into the swamp, and a new fire started to blaze within me, the burning desire to achieve my goals to save my country from environmental catastrophe.

In Cabang Panti Research Station, I have been tasked to help the orangutan project's ongoing research, including processing orangutan urine and fecal samples, filing information into the database, and following orangutans with the other assistants. Among all of these tasks, finding and observing the orangutans has been the highlight of my first month here. I found it really interesting how each individual orangutan can be identified not only by their physical traits, but also by their behavior and personalities! For example, Jumi, the first orangutan I followed, was identified by her sulking and weathered face. She is also very shy - she always tries to avoid being caught looking at us researchers, and she hides behind branches and leaves to prevent me from getting a good photograph of her. Codet, on the other hand, doesn't really care who's watching him. He often comes down to the ground, eats termites for hours on end, and

isn't afraid to defend his territory by charging at orangutans (or even people!) who get in his way.



*Adult female orangutan, Jumi, looks out through the canopy.  
Photo © Rinaldi Gotama*

One surprising and unexpected perk of living in a rainforest, in my experience, is the range of weird and wonderful gifts one can be given. Two weeks into my time here Toto, one of the field assistants, gave me a tooth of a wild boar. He suggested that I turn it into a necklace and take it back to Hong Kong. Sure, I said politely, but I immediately discarded the idea, imagining the difficulty immigration officers are going to put me into if I try to bring a ten-centimeter-long tooth of a dead animal to a place where ivory smuggling is a hot issue now. Research manager Kat is no different - one day after she hiked up, she gave me a porcupine quill that she had stumbled across on the way up. But the most remarkable gift Kat has given me so far has been a parang (a blade resembling a machete), which she handed to me as I was about to venture into the forest by myself. I stared at her with a mix of confusion and amusement and she stared back like it was a very casual thing to do. "It's for the rattan," she said.



*One of Rinaldi's tasks is to analyze orangutan urine and fecal samples - it's not a glamorous job, but is a must-learn task for any budding primatologist!*

Amazing and wonderful adventures aside, this journey has also been a challenging one. For someone who is just learning, finding an orangutan can be difficult - they hide way up in the forest canopy and they barely make any sound. It's possible that no matter how hard you scan through the forest vegetation, you can still be oblivious that a giant orange ape is lurking meters away from you. Getting lost in the forest has also been a daily event for me. Whether it's due to fallen trees, landslides, or simply dropping my glasses, I'm very talented at missing the pink ribbons that indicate a transect pathway. Once, I lost track of a path on the mountain and had to shove through crisp branches and huge logs, only to fall into a red and muddy peat swamp. But, no matter how hard a day becomes, I always have the promise of returning back to the relative comforts of camp, and the memory of when I first sat on the riverside *mandi* (bathing) dock, gazing on the green and lush surroundings, listening to animal sounds blaring like a jungle orchestra, and breathing in the cool, fresh air. I thought out loud, *I can get used to this*. And I have.

Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program (GPOCP)

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