

Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program



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An e-newsletter from your friends in West Kalimantan

Dear Friends and Supporters,

With summer fully upon us, I am happy to report that I have safely arrived in Indonesia for my annual visit. My trip this summer will be a short one, as my students, managers and I will be presenting at the International Primatological Society meeting in Chicago in mid-August. But it's always my yearly highlight to get into the forest with my family to observe the orangutans, even if it's just for a few weeks!

Our current Program Director, Cassie Freund, will be transitioning to a PhD at Wake Forest University at the beginning of August. We have truly appreciated Cassie's time here and will miss her dearly. See the article below to read about her experiences in Ketapang over the past two years. And, we are happy to announce the arrival of two Directors: Terri Breedon, our new Program Director, and Triana, Yayasan Palung Field Director. Read more about them in the side bar below.

The second article this month, written by Research Manager, Kat Scott, discusses some of the amazing big trees in GPNP, and the importance of our conservation and education efforts to save these magnificent beauties from extinction.

Sincerely,

In This Issue:

Reflections on Two Years in
Ketapang

-

Appreciating Forest Mega-
Flora

-

Welcome New GPOCP
Directors

-

GPOCP Annual Report
in Bahasa Indonesia

Welcome New
GPOCP Directors

Cheryl Knott, PhD
Executive Director

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

Reflections on Two Years in Ketapang

By Cassie Freund, GPOCP Program Director

I've been here in Ketapang as the GPOCP Program Director for 25 months now, with just a handful of days to go until I hand over the keys to the GPOCP castle (so to speak!) and return to the US to start my PhD at Wake Forest University. The past two years here have been full of experiences, both challenging and rewarding. From planning the GP30 conference last year, to sitting with the GPOCP staff and teaching them statistics so that they can analyze environmental education survey data, to hiking six hours in the blazing-heat-turned-pouring-rain to get to Cabang Panti Research Station, I feel like I've done it all!

The most satisfying part of my time here in Ketapang has been watching the GPOCP conservation staff grow and develop as a team. One of my main goals has been to improve communication among the various conservation teams and find synergies between our Investigation, Hutan Desa, Environmental Education, and Sustainable Livelihoods work. Although each team has their own activities and targets, there is a lot that they can learn from one another. Now, the Environmental Education team is using information from the Wildlife Crime field investigators to focus educational activities in villages where they will have the most impact for orangutan conservation, and the Sustainable Livelihoods team is working with the Hutan Desa program to find alternative economic activities for the project communities. As the only conservation NGO in the region with a long-term orangutan research project, we have also been working hard to integrate the data from Dr. Knott's scientific research into the conservation programs. A great example of this is the GIS mapping project with Dr. Amanda West, which we will soon be submitting for publication in an ecology journal.



Cassie (back right) with the Yayasan Palung staff after an annual meeting to discuss the conservation programs and efforts in and

This month we welcome our two new Directors, Terri and Triana, to the GPOCP family. Terri Breeden is originally from Florida, USA, and has a Master's degree in Environmental Science and Management. She previously collaborated with the Indonesian Agricultural University in Bogor on water quality research. This year we have expanded the administration to include a Field Director, Triana, who will work closely with the conservation staff and our local and national partners. Triana is originally from Jakarta and has worked in many places across Indonesia, including Central and East Kalimantan, as well as in Sumatra and Timor Leste. We are happy to have them working together to lead GPOCP forward!



GPOCP Annual Report in Bahasa Indonesia

We have recently translated

Of course, it hasn't all been easy! Working in Indonesia, especially Kalimantan, comes with its own challenges. Even simple things like finding an hour flight from the Indonesian capital of Jakarta to our home base in Ketapang can turn into a three-day marathon. This happened to me in October of last year during the fire season. I wrote a lot about the impact of the forest fires on orangutans and rainforest ecology in the second half of 2015, but the fires also took a major toll on mundane things like inter-island travel. Since Indonesia consists of over 17,000 islands, you can see how this may be a problem! I actually was traveling back to Borneo from the ZACC Conference in Colorado last year during the worst of it, and because the haze over West Kalimantan was so thick, all of the flights to Ketapang were canceled. I had to fly to Banjarmasin in South Kalimantan instead, where I took a 4-hour car ride to Palangkaraya in Central Kalimantan, followed by an 8-hour bus trip to Pangkalan Bun, and finally a 10-hour car journey through endless palm oil plantations to Ketapang. Amidst all of the other difficulties I've faced here, including tight deadlines, midnight Skype calls to America, and the aforementioned hike through a thunderstorm, I think that traveling during the fire season was by far the biggest challenge.



The view from an airplane over Pontianak on a clear day.

The most common question I have been asked in the past few days is whether I will miss Indonesia. After over five years here, there are certainly many things I'll miss when I return to the States! I'll miss the street food, the almost-guaranteed rainbows that follow afternoon thunderstorms, and the rainforest. I'll miss the familiarity of Ketapang's GPOCP office and my trusty motorbike that has taken me literally thousands of kilometers around this landscape. And I will certainly miss working with the GPOCP staff, each of whom has his or her own unique strengths. However, I'm also excited to watch the new Directors, Triana and Terri, bring fresh perspectives to the organization. I anticipate that in the future, GPOCP will work even more closely with our local partners, including the Gunung Palung National Park office and our Board and Advisory Council members, to champion orangutan conservation in the Gunung Palung landscape. I know that, although my PhD work will take me to the South American Amazon, this isn't the end of my time in Indonesia, and I will remain involved with GPOCP in some capacity. Thanks to all of our donors, supporters, and local partners who have assisted me personally over the past two years, you have helped me immensely and made a difference for the GP orangutans.

our 2015 Annual Report into Bahasa Indonesia. It can be viewed [here](#). Happy reading!



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"Make trees... not stumps."

-Anonymous-

Appreciating Forest Mega-Flora

By Kat Scott, Research Manager

Hailing from the UK, I am used to ancient oak woodlands and man-made pine forests. Until coming to Borneo, I assumed that apart from the redwoods in America, British trees were the biggest that there were. However, having worked in Kalimantan for the past few years, I have quickly realized that this is not the case. In Gunung Palung National Park (GPNP), we work among 8 different habitat types, including lowland rainforest, home to some of the biggest tropical trees in the world. This variety of habitats allows for a vast diversity of species to exist, and the timing of fruiting seasons between them provides food for orangutans throughout the year.

GPNP is home to many magnificent, rare and very ancient trees. Ironwood (*Eusyderoxylon zwageri*) and Dipterocarps (*Dipterocarpaceae*) dominate the lowland forest landscape and provide food, shelter and canopy cover for the inhabitants of the forest. Their branches provide homes for termites, tree holes for lorises and hornbills, and highways for orangutans. Fallen leaves act as ground cover, allowing the smallest organisms in this ecosystem to thrive. The biggest orangutan parties that we have observed involved huge durian and Dipterocarp trees, which are large enough that the orangutans can socialize, eat, and play with each other without encroaching into each individual's space. Solid branches and big leaves also provide the perfect nest building materials, and we find that our orangutans frequently make nests in the branches of large Shorea trees.



Kat displaying the size of some of the beautiful trees found in Gunung Palung National Park, West Kalimantan.

Sometimes big trees are parasitized by other species. Strangler figs live up to their name, with some claiming their tree victims at a young age, twisting and squeezing their way up trunks and branches until they eventually outgrow them. The fig fruits serve as a 'fall-back' resource for many animals including orangutans, meaning that in times of fruit scarcity in the forest, the animals still have access to a good source of nutrition.

Big trees are also important for many other reasons. In fact, Dipterocarps are the main group of trees that undergo the large fruit mastings that we see in Borneo every 2-10 years. Masting is a term used to describe a period of time where certain tree species synchronize reproduction, fruiting all at the same time. Masting brings the elusive, cryptic animal species out of their hiding places in the rainforest and it is a time when we observe many different species of animals feeding together. When these trees fruit and the seeds disperse, seedling nurseries are created across the forest floor, thus perpetuating the continuous cycle of growth. These seedlings take decades to grow to full height. However, right now annual forest fires may destroy some of these seedlings and they will thus be lost from the cycle. The need for sustainable farming and livelihood practices and responsible land use management in Indonesia is incredibly important, and this is where our conservation team comes in.



GPOCP staff member pondering the business of nature while admiring the magnitude of the foliage surrounding him.

With logging and hunting interrupting the natural forest regeneration cycle, many tree species are facing extinction. When we talk about the endangered species of Borneo, we often focus only on the fauna and ignore the flora. However, trees face many of the same conservation threats as charismatic species like the orangutan. In much the same way as people become outraged by orangutans being poached for the pet trade or killed during land clearing by oil palm companies, we should also be aware of the devastating effects that the loss of even one tree species might have on the rainforest ecosystem.

On a slightly less serious note, one thing I have realized from my time in the forest is that when the trees die or erosion causes them to fall, new habitats are also created! A large Shorea tree fell meters away from my house in Cabang Panti a few weeks ago, after hanging precariously over the river for a while. It took another large Dipterocarp with it, claiming smaller tree victims along the way and ripping huge chunks of bark off other nearby trees. However, this has

now provided a bridge for the long-tailed macaques and red langurs that come to taunt me at 5:30 am every morning when the sun comes up. As this tree breaks down, it will provide a range of services for many members of the rainforest. It is this circle of life that allows for the rainforest to continue and that is what we must work hard to protect.

Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program (GPOCP)

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