

Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program



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Code RED

An e-newsletter from your friends in West Kalimantan

Dear Friends and Supporters,

I have just returned from my annual visit to Indonesia and two conferences in Chicago. Our first article this month features some highlights from my trip. It was amazing to be back in the forest again and to have some of the best views I've ever had of wild orangutan behavior!

The second article, written by our Conservation Education Manager, Mayi Achmed, introduces our new Bornean Orangutan Caring Scholars (BOCS). The interns reveal their inspiring stories about why they are passionate about orangutans and protecting their habitat. We also learn about some of their work this past month to help our conservation and education efforts.

In August, we were also honored to be a part of the International Primatological Society/American Society of Primatologists joint meeting in Chicago. I also was invited speaker at the *Chimpanzees in Context* conference. Check out the side bar and our Facebook page to learn more.

Sincerely,

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GPOCP at IPS/ASP

From August 21st-27th
the GPOCP team took up
residence in Chicago for

Cheryl Knott

Cheryl Knott, PhD
Executive Director

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

Close Encounters with Alfred and Walimah

By Cheryl Knott, GPOCP Executive Director

It's dark now and Walimah has finally made her nest and gone to bed. Hassan and Sahril are giving the tree an aluminum tag with the number 79589. It's hard to believe that the study site has that many tagged trees - most of them representing where an orangutan ate or slept. Using headlamps to see, we measure the tree's diameter and then tie a biodegradable string to the tag. Our GPS units tell us where the nearest trail is, and we start bushwacking our way through the forest, trying not to trip on the roots emerging from the swamp water and avoiding the snarls of rattan vines that catch our clothing and hair. My graduate student, Andrea Blackburn, and I look for small bits of protruding earth, or at least shallower water, to place our next step. Hassan has been leading the string out as we slowly make our way out of the swamp. When we finally reach the trail, he ties the string off across it and attaches a bit of flagging. The next morning a new team will use this as their guide to get to the orangutan's nest before dawn. Once on the trail, we follow the path back another 40 minutes to camp, looking forward to washing the dirt off by jumping in our glorious river when we return.



Walimah, moving along to her next rainforest meal.

And so ends another day of following wild orangutans. I'm thrilled to be back in the forest and spending time with my team - clarifying questions, reviewing our procedures and being in the thick of it again. I spent much of August in the field, visiting the research and conservation projects with my family - Tim, Russell and Jessica. Although our visits never seem to last as long as we would like, we were sure lucky in the number of orangutans we saw. The staff seem to think the orangutans know when 'Ibu Cheryl' has come back. We were particularly eager to encounter Walimah and see how her foot was healing. It was thus a special delight when she was found just a few days before the end of our visit. Because orangutans have such big home ranges, we can't really go out and find a particular individual - we just have to hope we get lucky - although we do use a bit of

the annual IPS/ASP meeting. We shared 11 presentations and posters about our research and conservation work. We want to thank Andrea Blackburn, Andrea DiGiorgio, Amy Scott, Kat Scott, Caitlin O'Connell and Dr. Cheryl Knott for their insightful work. Check out the pictures of their posters and presentations on our Facebook page!



GPOCP team with Jane Goodall at IPS/ASP meeting.

World Orangutan Day

On August 19th, we celebrated World Orangutan Day! Our volunteers and interns went a round Ketapang and asked residents, "What do orangutans mean to you?" We had a great show of support from the community. Be sure to check out Facebook and Instagram to see more photos!



Police officers in Ketapang supporting World Orangutan Day.

detective work to track them down. Amazingly, Walimah's foot looks totally healed. The skin is no longer puffy and, surprisingly, she is able to use her two remaining toes to help grasp branches. She doesn't seem to be able to use them to form a tight grip, though, but this is a vast improvement over last summer when they were just useless, non-functioning appendages.



Walimah displays her healed left foot, with two toes missing and a chunk bitten out of the side.

The next day after my adventure in the swamp, Andrea and I are joined by the rest of my family. Robert Rodriguez Suro, my former student and volunteer, who has just spent the year conducting as many multi-day follows as he can of males by camping out in the forest with them, accompanies us as well. You never know what a day following orangutans will bring. Often, it's fairly routine: they get up, travel, eat, travel, eat, travel But, then, sometimes, something amazing happens. This was to be one of those days. The orangutans were again in this particularly nasty bit of freshwater swamp all day. We had two teams out, one following Walimah and the other following Beth and her six-year-old juvenile, Benny. Beth is looking pretty old now and I can't help but remember our week long, all day follows of her back in 1995 when she was pregnant with her first baby. One of those epic days was recorded in my first *National Geographic* article back in 1998. I started that piece by quoting Tim, who, as we waded neck deep in the floodwaters that had risen up on our way home, turned around to say to me, "are we in Borneo or



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"Conservation is a state of harmony between men and land"

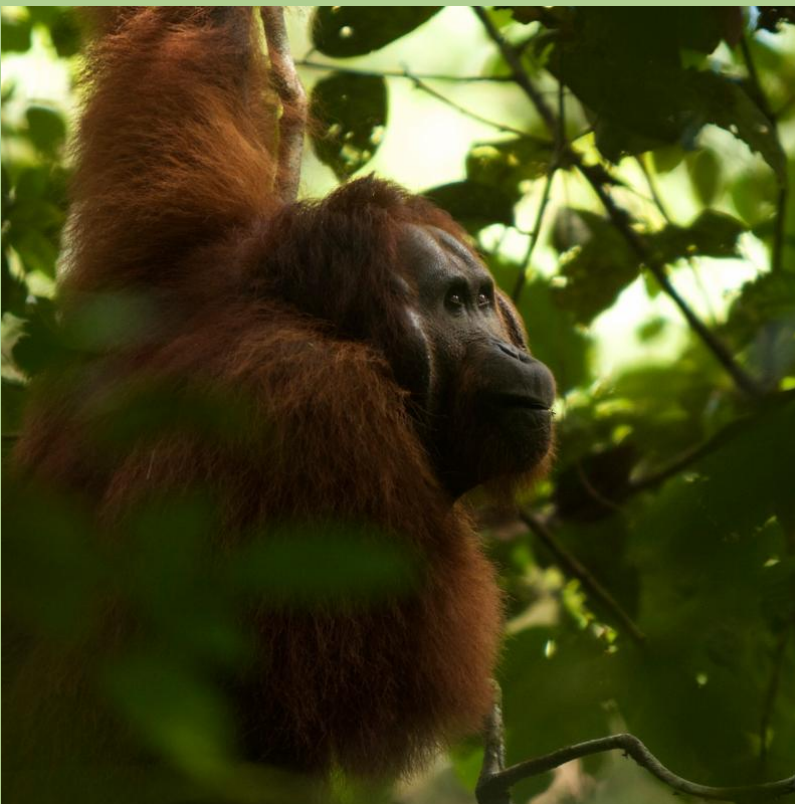
-Aldo Leopold-

what?" This is another "are we in Borneo or what" spot. With every step I take my rubber boot gets stuck in the mud and I have to reach down and yank it out. Sometimes my momentum carries me forward and I keep going, sinking my socked foot into the muck as my boot stays entrenched in the mud. And, I have to admit to doing a full body plant in the swamp more than once.



Jessica Laman follows an orangutan while knee deep in the Gunung Palung freshwater swamp.

The follow starts out to be pretty routine - one of those where the orangutans are feeding 30m up in the top of a tree for hours. Using our binoculars we can barely see a bit of orange fur, but we keep track of their feeding by listening and counting the falling fruit husks that litter the area around us. Eventually, someone hears a rustling in the understory - and we know by the sound that it's another orangutan. Could this be a male traveling low? We head over to the noise, and sure enough, it's Alfred, the new dominant male in the study population.



The new dominant flanged male in our study site, Alfred, pauses after feeding on a snack of leaves. Photo by Russell Laman.

He's a magnificent animal and amazingly habituated. He could care less about the big party of humans looking at him as he continues feeding on the low lying vegetation. Standing just a few meters away, this is the closest I've ever come, in over 20 years of research, to a wild orangutan. Rarely do orangutans feed so low down that we can see them this clearly. He doesn't even look at us, but seems oblivious to our presence - the way we want it to be. Then, he starts moving towards the females we've been following. Undoubtedly, this is what has led him to this isolated bit of swamp forest. He races up a tree and pushes over the top part of a tree snag. After it comes crashing down he lets out a magnificent long call, letting all know that he has arrived. Alfred puts on quite a display, continuing to crash around and long calling several times for the benefit of all in earshot. Then, to our surprise, he starts chasing Beth and they spend over 10 minutes mating. This is the clearest view of mating that any of us have ever had. Of course, Tim and Robert have captured it on videotape. What a way to spend our last day in the field this year! And, maybe next year we will be following Beth around with a brand new baby.



Russell Laman, Cheryl Knott and Jessica Laman get an up close view of Alfred foraging on low lying vegetation.

Getting to Know Our Local Scholars

By Mariamah Achmad, Conservation Education Manager

For the past month, the GPOCP office in Ketapang has been alive with youthful chatter as we had our Bornean Orangutan Caring Scholarship (BOCS) recipients here to participate in their internship as part of their scholarship requirement. The BOCS is designed for local students in the Gunung Palung landscape who are interested in orangutan and forest conservation and who otherwise might not be financially able to attend college. Our partners at Orangutan Outreach and Orang Utan Republik Foundation help provide the recipients with tuition and related fees to attend Tanjungpura University (UNTAN) in Pontianak, West Kalimantan. This past month our previous recipients made an educational video about what Gunung Palung National Park means to them, helped spread the word about World Orangutan Day throughout Ketapang, and supported our Environmental Education team with field trips, lectures and expeditions to local villages and schools throughout the area.



Our BOCS interns educating young students about orangutans and conservation at a local school using puppets and games.

This year we are fortunate enough to offer six more students college scholarships as part of the BOCS programs. Our students hail from the regencies of Kayong Utara and Ketapang. We are excited to have Supriadi, Victor, Sari, and Dedi, who are studying forestry, and Erwan and Nur, who are studying biological science.



Our 2016 BOCS recipients are from left to right, Nur Sholihin, Victor Samudera, Erwan Wahyudi, Sari Ulandari, Supriadi and Dedi Januri. The BOCS project supporters in the back are Dedy Fahroni, Gary Shapiro, Mariamah Achmad, Cassie Freund and Ucup Supraitna.

Supriadi enjoys singing, dancing and spending time in nature. He plans to take advantage of this opportunity to gain the skills necessary to educate people on the importance of maintaining healthy ecosystems throughout the world. He has seen the environmental damage caused by converting land into oil palm plantations and he hopes to be an ambassador for young students by campaigning for the importance of conservation and sustainability.

Victor Samudera understands that the environment provides everything necessary for human life. He is worried about the amount of illegal

mining and logging occurring in his hometown and has experienced landslides and floods because of those activities. To mitigate these effects, Victor plans to start a reforestation project in his neighborhood and educate neighbors on how to properly dispose of waste and save on energy.

Sari Ulandari grew up in a challenging economic situation and plans to use her education to help her family. Because of her mother's health issues, her father had to work at home and provide for his family through farming their plot of land. Through this, Sari gained an appreciation for plants and trees, which is why she has chosen to study forestry. Sari wants people to realize that humans and nature need each other to survive.



Sari signs her award with Cassie, Gary, Mariamah and Desi.

Dedi Januri is a young man who enjoys adventures in the wild and was a prominent member of his high school nature lovers club. He understands the importance of orangutans, the forest and other special habitats. He has seen his community taken over by palm oil companies and is motivated to protect the earth and the precious gifts that it provides for our livelihoods.

Ervan Wahyudi was motivated to apply for the BOCS program because he does not want to see any more habitat and wildlife lost. He plans to bring action to the communities by starting small and expanding his efforts for conservation. He also wants to learn the proper techniques to bring clean water back to local communities.

Nur Shalihin applied to the BOCS program to help fund his education, as his parents would not have been able to afford to send him to university for a formal education. The first time he saw an orangutan was at a zoo in Java. That moment changed his life as he realized he had a different reaction than did the other visitors. He believes these amazing animals should be kept in the wild and is concerned about the tragic state of orangutans because of hunting and deforestation. He hopes to gain knowledge and experience from GPOCP to do positive work and raise awareness in his community once he graduates.

We want to say congratulations for a job well done this month for the activities completed by our interns and we want to give our new BOCS recipients a warm welcome to GPOCP. We look forward to working together over the next few years as you learn about orangutans and rainforest conservation.



BOCS recipient, Nur, accepting his scholarship award.

Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program (GPOCP)

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