

Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program



September 2016

Issue: 45

Code RED

An e-newsletter from your friends in West Kalimantan

Dear Friends and Supporters,

Welcome to our latest edition of *Code Red*

! This month we lead off with the experiences of one of our Bornean Orangutan Caring Scholars at the Cabang Panti research station in Gunung Palung National Park. Muhlis Saputra spent 4 weeks becoming fully immersed in the orangutan research project and literally getting his feet wet in the Bornean swamps. I enjoyed spending many days with Muhlis, and the other Indonesian counterpart students, this summer and am honored that GPOCP can help support and train the next generation of Indonesian scientists.

Did you know September 24th was World Rivers Day? To commemorate this event, we are sharing some of the results of our biodiversity surveys collected around the Matan river in Gunung Palung National Park. Rivers play a critical role in maintaining the diversity of Gunung Palung's ecosystems. This article was written by Edward Tang, our Environmental Education Coordinator, who is very experienced in leading biodiversity surveys. He recently performed floral surveys and counted orangutan nests to determine the biodiversity of the Customary Forests that we are helping to protect around Gunung Palung National Park.

Please check out our side bar on how using Giving Assistant for your everyday purchases can help us with our efforts at GPOCP. It is free and easy to use! We also share an update about the unusual pangolin.

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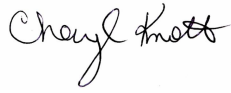
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Good News for Pangolins

Giving Assistant

Giving Assistant is a
free, easy, and reliable

Sincerely,



Cheryl Knott, PhD
Executive Director

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

A Rainforest Internship

By Muhlis Saputra, BOCS Recipient

Through the Bornean Orangutan Caring Scholarship (BOCS), offered to me by the Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program, I have carried out a one month internship for each year of my studies. I am currently in my final year at Tanjungpura University, where I study forestry, so last month I spent my internship at Cabang Panti, the research station in Gunung Palung National Park (GPNP).

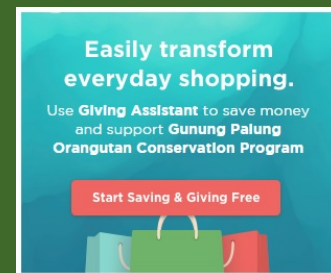


Muhlis (second left) with Cabang Panti research assistants, other Indonesian students and National Park staff.

The expedition started by making the trek into GPNP to reach the research station. This may sound like an easy task, but I soon realized that it is quite a long and strenuous hike at around 15 kilometers, or about 9 miles. The most challenging part was going through the peat swamp that had recently burned. It was extremely hot and difficult to walk through as my boots were constantly stuck in the muck. Another difficult segment of the hike involved crossing two sections of the river. At first I was nervous, but I had the encouragement of some of my fellow BOCS students with me. After 5 hours, I was extremely tired, but we finally reached our destination.

The next day I spent getting myself acquainted with my home for the next month. My sleeping quarters were in a new building constructed by the National Park. It has a very basic set-up, but did provide generator supplied power for 7 hours per day. I was introduced to the research assistants and given more information about my daily responsibilities while at camp. That day I also learned how to use a

way to help GPOCP go even further. When you shop online at 1800+ popular online retailers using Giving Assistant, you earn cash back. Then, you get to decide how much of that cash back you'd like to donate to GPOCP. You'll even find great deals like JCPenny Coupons, as well as savings at stores like Target and Kohl's. Shop. Earn. Change the world! Check out our [webpage](#) for more information.



Good News for Pangolins

The pangolin is an endangered animal found in Gunung Palung National Park. CITES has just recommended that all 8 species be protected from international commercial trade!



Photo credit worldwildlife.org



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handheld GPS and soon found this to be one of the most valuable tools while in the forest.



The new camping quarters at Cabang Panti Research Station.

My days for the next few weeks were full of adventure. Every morning, I would wake up early, eat breakfast and head out into the forest with the field assistants in search of orangutans. Once an orangutan was found, I would spend time observing their behavior. I would monitor what the animal was doing, what type of food it was eating and any other notable characteristics. One of the less pleasing tasks involved recording orangutan bowel movements. While this was quite smelly, I learned that we can gain a great deal of information about seed dispersal through this method. I recorded all of my findings with the new Ipads. Just before dusk, I would make my way back to camp to eat dinner, relax and download my data. Dr. Cheryl Knott was in the forest with me for my first two weeks and I enjoyed being able to learn about orangutans directly from her.



Muhlis downloading the data collected during the day after he arrives back at Cabang Panti.

I am truly honored and proud to be one of the few BOCS recipients.



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"In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks"

-John Muir-

The experiences I have been afforded have been incredible and will have lifelong effects. From these opportunities, I have learned a sense of responsibility, teamwork and proper research techniques. One of my hobbies is photography. In between data collection, I was able to capture images of orangutans and other wildlife in their natural habitat. I am grateful for the opportunity to sharpen my skills and add material to my portfolio. Moving forward, I plan to use the skills I have gained in life and in the field of forestry and conservation.



Muhlis observing orangutans in Gunung Palung National Park.

Rivers and Biodiversity Around Gunung Palung National Park

By Edward Tang, Conservation Education Coordinator

Do you know why we should protect local rivers and forests? Of course the obvious reasons include species and habitat conservation, but healthy ecosystems also help prevent many natural disasters from occurring. Some of the benefits include better drainage to prevent flooding and erosion, and helping to maintain soil fertility. Healthy forests also contribute to clean, healthy water. There are two main rivers in Gunung Palung, the Matan River and the smaller Palung River and these rivers provide much of the clean drinking water for West Kalimantan. They also provide us access to the Cabang Panti research station as we often use boats on the Matan and Palung Rivers to transport supplies and people to the research camp.



The Matan River, West Kalimantan.

We are currently in the process of creating a new Customary Forest that borders Gunung Palung National Park. This Customary Forest will be a legally protected area of land that is owned by local indigenous communities. These aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems provide many basic life functions for these communities. Probably the most notable is the regulation of the drinking water supply. This healthy forest helps prevent salt water intrusion and filters contaminants out, so the drinking water remains clean. The healthy forest also prevents flooding. The soil is able to absorb excess water, whereas if the soil has been manipulated, less absorption will occur. Less absorption leads to increased erosion, landslides and loss of soil fertility. These are important factors to keep in mind as Indonesia has two seasons: wet and dry. During the wet or rainy season, West Kalimantan usually receives over 400 mm, or 10 inches of rain per month. If this rain is not absorbed into the soil, it runs off the land taking soil, nutrients and debris with it. This runoff, then ends up in the river and can cause catastrophic effects on the aquatic ecosystem. It is important to recognize that changes in terrestrial systems cause changes in aquatic systems.



Edward Tang in the heart of the rainforest collecting data for the biodiversity surveys.

This region of forest also has many other potential uses and benefits. In order to determine those potential uses and the biodiversity found there, GPOCP conducted surveys and analyses of the flora and fauna to gain a better understanding of the potential benefits that can be managed

in a sustainable manner. Our initial results conducted in the Paduan Village region found 0.5 orangutan nests per square kilometer for a total of 34 nests from the 6,788 hectares surveyed. We also found more than 100 species of plants, consisting of 42 families. Of those 42 families, we found that 72% are food trees for orangutans. Distribution of the orangutan food trees such as *Lithocarpus conocarpus*, *Lancifolia litsea*, *Diospyros maingayi*, and *Santiria oblongifolia* ranked high on the Shannon-Wiener biodiversity index, with a value of 3.7. The Shannon Wiener index is commonly used to characterize species diversity within a community. The values range from 0 to 5 and represent increasing biodiversity. A value of 3.7 indicates a rather bio-diverse community and proves that the area is ideal for wildlife, especially orangutans.



An orangutan nest spotted by our team during their biodiversity survey.

This forest area also has the potential to become a destination for ecotourism and education. A boat ride along the river offers wonderful views of nature and wildlife. As our survey discovered, it is an ideal habitat for orangutans and other primate species, such as proboscis monkeys and gibbons. With the implementation of a legal Customary Forest, this area will be protected and maintained as a healthy ecosystem for generations to come, for both human and wildlife.



A healthy forest surrounding Gunung Palung National Park. Photo copyright Tim Laman.

Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program (GPOCP)

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