

# Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program



December 2016

Issue: 48

## Code RED

An e-newsletter from your friends in West Kalimantan

Dear Friends and Supporters,

Wow... another year is coming to an end and 2017 is shining bright on the horizon. We hope everyone had a wonderful holiday filled with family and friends. We are starting our latest edition of *Code Red* with a look back at our top 10 accomplishments for 2016.

Our second article is by Rebecca Curtis, our newest Research Assistant helping out with the project. She recently arrived in Borneo and shares her experiences so far.

On the side bar, check out information regarding our most recent scientific publication and our collaboration with Greenpeace Indonesia.

Finally, our team at GPOCP wants to wish everyone a safe and happy New Year! We are looking forward to what 2017 has to offer.

Sincerely,

Cheryl Knott, PhD  
Executive Director

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

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## 2016 In Review

By Terri Breeden, GPOCP Program Director

It is hard to believe that another year has passed us by. Our research project is now entering its 25th year and our conservation efforts are just shy of 2 decades, at 18 years! During the 2016 year, we accomplished a lot in terms of orangutan research and conservation. To bring in the New Year we thought we would celebrate by having a countdown of 10 of our top conservation and research accomplishments.

### 1. Spread Conservation Awareness and Education to over 5,000 Students

In 2016, we exceeded our expectations! We visited nearly 65 schools throughout the Ketapang and Kayong Utara regencies and interacted with over 5,000 students. As environmental education is not part of the normal school curricula, our team traveled near and far to teach students of all ages about orangutans and protecting their habitat.



A local school class excited about GPOCP visiting and sharing information about orangutan conservation.

### 2. Gave 11 presentations at the International Primatological Congress in Chicago

Our research and conservation teams gave a total of 11 presentations at the biggest meeting ever of primatologists - the International Primatological Congress of 2016 in Chicago. Our topics ranged from conservation education to wounding patterns, diet, and parasites in wild orangutans.

### 3. Reported on 15 cases of Illegally Held Orangutans

Our investigative team works tirelessly to find cases of people illegally keeping orangutans as pets and helps ease human-orangutan conflicts. In 2016, the team reported 15 cases to local officials.

a scientific paper in *The American Journal of Primatology* about orangutan-related wildlife crime investigations in West Kalimantan. Be sure to check out next month's newsletter to learn more!

## GPOCP & Greenpeace Indonesia

This month we collaborated with *Greenpeace Indonesia* to build the capacity of local officials in using GIS technology and we worked with local communities, training them how to prevent forest fires.



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Forward to a Friend



*An illegally held orangutan found during GPOCP investigations in early 2016. This juvenile was soon rescued and transferred to the local rehabilitation facility.*

*"Conservation is a state of harmony between man and land"*

*-Aldo Leopold-*

#### **4. Featured in National Geographic Magazine - making the front cover of National Geographic Indonesia**

Dr. Cheryl Knott's research and conservation efforts were recognized worldwide in the December issue of *National Geographic* in the article *Out on a Limb*, photographed by her husband, Tim Laman.

In the article, author Mel White, highlights Dr. Knott's research and conservation work.

#### **5. Awarded 6 new scholarships with our BOCS program**

Our Bornean Orangutan Caring Scholarship (BOCS) program expanded to 19 students and this year we had our first 2 students graduate from the program. GPOCP is working closely with all students and assisting the graduates with job placement.

#### **6. Improved Quality of Life for Alternative Livelihood Artisans**

The GPOCP Sustainable Livelihoods team has been working hard to help our artisan groups grow and expand their business of Non-timber Forest Product (NTFP) crafts. This year we are happy to announce that some of our artisans have earned enough money from the sales of their crafts to build new homes and make investments for the future. Our efforts have taught these groups how to make a meaningful wage in a sustainable manner.



*The increase in sales of handicrafts has led to a better quality of life for our artisans and their families.*

**7. Featured in 'Mission Critical: Orangutan on the Edge' documentary on Nat Geo Wild**

Dr. Cheryl Knott and her husband, Tim Laman, helped create a documentary that was aired worldwide about the orangutans in Gunung Palung National Park.

**8. Spent 2967 hours in the field collecting behavioral data on wild orangutans**

Our research team spent much of their year residing at Cabang Panti Research Station in order to collect nearly 3,000 hours worth of data. A big highlight for this year is that one of our most famous resident females, Walimah, has been spotted with some big flanged and unflanged males. Maybe she'll get to a mother again soon!



*Walimah with her baby in early 2016. Be sure to watch 'Mission Critical' to find out more about their story. Photo credit Tim Laman.*

#### **9. Hosted and mentored 16 college students from UNTAN**

We helped support 16 students from Tanjungpura University (UNTAN) to visit Gunung Palung National Park and participate in the research at the Cabang Panti Research Station. During their month long stays, the students worked with researchers to learn new skills and complete research required for their bachelor degrees.

#### **10. Sponsored a GIS training course**

GPOCP held two GIS training workshops for all of our staff as well as National Park rangers, and village leaders. This training provided a valuable skill to all participants by being able to produce accurate maps and GPS data.

Of course, none of these activities would be possible without the support from our donors, sponsors and followers. The Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program wants to thank each and every person and organization for their dedication to orangutan conservation. We are proud of our accomplishments in 2016 and are looking forward to what 2017 has to offer.

## **The Start of a Wild Year**

*By Rebecca Curtis, Research Assistant*

I sit here on a flight to Istanbul on my way home to the UK for a family Christmas, excitedly looking over the plane food menu. The usually cramped seating feels luxurious to me. Turkish airlines isn't half bad, but it's nothing special. The reason for my positive outlook on Economy Class is that I've been living on a diet consisting mainly of rice, tofu and cabbage and I don't remember the last time I settled down onto a fully cushioned seat. You see, I have been lucky enough to work with the Gunung Palung Orangutan Project since September as a Research Assistant at the secluded, peaceful and yet adventure-filled rainforest research base that

is Cabang Panti. What's more, is that I'm nowhere near finished! As we enter the New Year I'll be racing back into that lush green forest to continue my training and gain more experience in wild orangutan field research for another nine fabulous months.



*Rebecca processing orangutan follow data at Cabang Panti Research Station.*

Gunung Palung forest is denser, more beautiful and more alive than I ever dreamed about while impatiently waiting for my visa back in the UK. I never expected it to be as magically wondrous as it is. Did you know that if you sit below a tree in the dark, early hours of the morning (waiting for an orangutan to wake up, obviously), without any head torch or flash light, you might find the forest floor around you slowly becoming aglow? Staring in wonder at the illuminated ground, you realize it is a bioluminescent fungus growing on the leaf litter, but this made it no less magical! In the evenings, it's the air that sparkles rather than the floor, and I've found myself several times leaning out the windowsill of our upstairs lab and staring into the shadowed tree tops where fire flies twinkle.



*The dense forest surrounding Cabang Panti Research Station. Photo by Rebecca Curtis.*

My first encounter with an orangutan was a truly memorable one! I walked through the forest for the first time on my own learning how to use the GPS equipment when I heard the cracking and swaying of branches above. I slowly crept closer towards the sound when suddenly the tree next to my shoulder began to viciously shake as whatever was above was

climbing down! I raced back to the path metres away, and heard a loud kiss squeak ring out behind me. Trying to catch my breath, I stood on the path and peered around a tree to view where I was just standing. A large flanged male orangutan stood upright at the "V" of the tree trunk glaring at me angrily for giving him such a fright. "You and me both!" I thought as I slowly backed away down the path. Now more experienced in tracking orangutans, I kick myself for not following him. Since I am the "newbie" I don't blame myself for leaving behind a very angry and very large male! Lately my encounters have been much more successful, and much less of a shock, although I have had to dodge a few falling dead trees aimed at me by mother Bibi, who doesn't seem to be too fond of me yet. Her baby, Bayas, who seems less bothered by my presence, is beginning to venture from the safety of his mother's torso, and he often stares at me as he swings upside down from a branch, biting and waving a twig. We have seen a lot of Bibi and Bayas the past few months, other individual females and a few young males, but alas no large flanged males! I'll have to wait and see what the New Year brings!



*Mother, Bibi, and her baby, Bayas, during a follow by Rebecca at Cabang Panti. Photo credit Rebecca Curtis.*

As much as we intentionally try to seek out animal encounters of a certain great ape kind, a great deal of wild and wacky encounters occur at the most unexpected moments. A snake and a civet battle to the death at the bottom steps of our main house as you hobble out of bed in the early hours. You stroll down the path, focusing your attention on the tree tops, when you stop frozen mid-step as an otter scurries up the river bank and devours a fish only a few feet away. Lizards and rodents appear in buckets or paddling in the toilet bowl while spiders of all shapes and sizes cling to the corners of the concrete walls and roof panels.

Every day is completely different from the last, whether you're clambering through thick-vined swamps, climbing rocky mountain tops or wading down a river. Many days I sit in our little wooden office upstairs in the main building, learning various detailed data files and programs we use for our valuable research data, and I am often distracted by the family of macaques that play in the tree tops just meters away. The more data I input into the files from our research, the more my knowledge grows, particularly on individual orangutans, the scientific methods of properly researching orangutans, and the botanical diversity of the forest.

The people that make up our team at camp all have completely different personalities and each brings something different to everyone's experience at camp. The language barrier is often challenging, but I am satisfied with how much I have learned in only a few short months. Many evenings we play games where we take turns quizzing each other in our knowledge of our different mother tongues. I can't wait to see how far my Indonesian develops by the end of the year!

I am so appreciative for all I have seen, learned and experienced in the first few months at this special camp in the depths of the Bornean Rainforest. Words cannot describe how excited I am to return and experience so much more than I could have imagined possible! 2017 could possibly hold my greatest adventures yet!

Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program (GPOCP)

<http://saveGPorangutans.org>

savegporangutans@gmail.com



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