

Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program



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Issue: 49

Code RED

An e-newsletter from your friends in West Kalimantan

Dear Friends and Supporters,

Happy New Year and welcome to our latest edition of *Code Red*! This month we lead off with the news of our recent publication describing our efforts and successes at combatting wildlife crime in West Kalimantan. This article, published last month in the *American Journal of Primatology*, highlights ten years of our investigations, and was picked up by BBC Earth!

Our second article is by Katherine Scott, our Research Manager at Cabang Panti. Kat recently accepted an offer to enter the PhD program at Oxford Brookes University in England. She will be studying the behavior of orangutans that venture into oil palm plantations. I want to give Kat a heartfelt thanks for her dedication and support and wish her all the best in her future career as a primatologist.

Our side bar has a link to a radio interview with one of our education staff, Edward Tang, who talks about the changes he has seen in the forests of West Kalimantan.

And finally, Happy Chinese New Year!

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Happy New Year

Sincerely,



Cheryl Knott, PhD
Executive Director

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

A Decade of Investigations

By Cassie Freund, former GPOCP Program Director

Since 2004, one of our core conservation agendas aims to combat orangutan poaching and trade through our Wildlife Crime Monitoring and Investigation Program. Poaching and the pet trade are significant threats to Bornean orangutans, but due to the secretive and underground nature of the illegal wildlife trade, it has been difficult for researchers and conservationists to quantify the number of individual orangutans affected each year. GPOCP's long-term work on this issue has resulted in a unique data set of orangutan victims of the pet trade and the spatial distribution of such cases in the Gunung Palung landscape. In early 2016 we were invited to submit a research article for a special issue of *American Journal of Primatology* on the wildlife trade to highlight our work. Our paper, "Ten years of orangutan-related wildlife crime investigation in West Kalimantan, Indonesia" was published last month and we are excited to share our main findings here, as well as in a recent interview with [BBC Earth](#) that really brought our paper to life!



A juvenile orangutan being held as a pet. This individual was discovered during GPOCP investigations into wildlife crimes.

Photo © GPOCP.

Between 2004-2014, GPOCP's investigators uncovered 145 cases of orangutans being illegally kept as pets across Ketapang and Kayong Utara regencies. This is an average of 13.2 cases/year. We identified six "hotspot" sub-districts, from which over half of the cases originated. One of our main concerns was to test for evidence of an organized crime ring targeting orangutans in and around Gunung Palung, as we have reason to suspect that there is organized [poaching of helmeted hornbills](#) occurring inside of the park, and there have recently been confiscations of Sumatran orangutans in international airports in Indonesia and abroad. We did not find any evidence of this in our landscape, which is positive news and supports previous observations that most of the orangutan trade on Borneo is for the local pet market. Finally, we found that the number of cases of orangutan

Fighting for Forests

Recently, Carolyn Beeler from PRI (Public Radio International) visited West Kalimantan. While in the area she interviewed Edward Tang, our Education Coordinator. Check out this [story](#) and the series about Indonesia's forests.



Happy New Year from GPOCP

With so many holidays being recently celebrated, we want to wish everyone a Happy New Year and a Happy Chinese New Year! We are looking forward to what 2017 has to offer.



poaching uncovered by our investigators was highest in sub-districts with the most land under oil palm concessions. This confirmed our suspicions and anecdotal evidence that as some areas are deforested for agriculture, people have more access to previously inaccessible forests, and that this is detrimental to wildlife in those forests.



Another baby orangutan being held illegally as a pet in West Kalimantan. Photo © GPOCP.

We ended our paper with several recommendations for how to address the problem of poaching and the illegal pet trade. Indonesia has wildlife protection laws, but they are very rarely enforced, a fact that is widely lamented among conservationists and Indonesian citizens alike. First, we recommend that the laws be updated and punishments for poachers and traders strengthened. Punishments should be enforced for all offenders, including oil palm and mining companies that clear land outside of their designated concession areas, and the government employees in charge of enforcement should be held accountable. We also suggested that NGOs doing environmental education programs

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"It's not whether animals will survive, it's whether man has the will to save them"

-Anthony Douglas Williams-

target the judges and lawyers of Indonesia's judicial system to raise awareness of the importance of law enforcement for wildlife. Finally, we recommended a funding increase of \$3 million annually for conservation law enforcement across Borneo; this would allow the government to hire and train additional field staff as well as to take advantage of new technologies that could streamline their work.



A wild orangutan infant with her mother. In the wild, orangutans spend their first eight years with their mother learning the ropes to life in the forest. Photo © Tim Laman.

Orangutan poaching is a hot topic that has been covered from many angles, and our paper contributes to the growing body of knowledge on the topic. Our motivations were twofold: first, to disseminate information about our Wildlife Crime Monitoring and Investigation program, which is now in its 13th year, and second, to scientifically measure some of the predicted drivers of orangutan poaching/trade. This in turn allows conservation groups working across Borneo and Sumatra to better target their work and, hopefully, to engage with large agriculture and mining companies to find ways to mitigate the impact of their industry on all wildlife. Finally, as noted in the [BBC Earth article](#) covering our publication, we are concerned about the potential impact of the expansion of oil palm in Africa on the African great apes. For example, the projected suitable habitat for oil palm in Africa overlaps with 99.2% of bonobo habitat. We hope that the results of our paper spur conservationists working in chimpanzee, gorilla, and bonobo range countries to be proactive in engaging with industry to prevent an increase in poaching of these species in the future. Given this week's [report](#) that 60% of primate species are in danger of going extinct, we have no time to waste!

Reminiscing Cabang Panti and Gunung Palung National Park

By Katherine Scott, GPOCP Research Manager

It's 11 a.m. and I'm sitting on the highest point of Gunung Palung National Park. It took around 3 hours to get here and involved a steep climb along several peaks. There are many reasons I find myself here. For a start, I've never climbed this side of the mountain before and wanted to challenge myself. The second, and saddest reason, is that I am bidding farewell to Cabang Panti after 2.5 years of managing the orangutan project. I've had a pretty spectacular final couple of weeks and I feel incredibly lucky. I got up close and personal (by accident) to a wild binturong, saw a crestless fireback (a rarely seen

species of bird) and had coffee with a pair of playful otters on the beach outside my house. I saw a flying squirrel on an orangutan follow, followed rarely seen pig-tailed macaque troops on their journey through the rainforest and even got into the holiday spirit by making a Christmas tree from things we found in the camp lab.



My incredible view from the highest peak in Gunung Palung National Park. Photo © Kat Scott.

So how do I sum up the past few years? A time with many ups, downs, highs, lows and literally everything in between. I've climbed mountains, broken bones (literally), fallen in (and out!) of love with orangutans depending on what they've made me do, dealt with the weirdest medical ailments, managed students through their fieldwork from both local and international universities and rescued all manner of wildlife from the camp toilet at 3am before an orangutan follow. I've sat on buses with meowing rice sacks (people taking kittens home. It was a very surreal experience as I thought I was going mad for nearly an hour until someone laughed and told me they were taking kittens to their daughter's house), had tea with so many families I've lost count, eaten my body weight in snacks at countless meetings and filled my passport to the brim (twice!) with visa stamps in order to work in this beautiful country. I've managed a fantastic and dynamic team who made me laugh when it didn't seem possible and we supported each other when times were tough. I've met some wonderful like-minded people on my journey, and helped aide the next generation of Indonesian scientists and researchers. I've lived through some of the worst forest fires Borneo has ever seen, countless droughts, El Niño and of course the 3 a.m. swims to camp when flash floods swept me out of my bed. I appeared in the *National Geographic* program which aired in 2016 about Dr. Tim Laman and Dr. Cheryl Knott and their work with orangutans. I learned new research techniques and skills from this job and enjoyed the opportunity for a more hands-on role. I am particularly thankful to Dr. Cheryl Knott who got me to this place and allowed me to take charge of a world-renowned research project deep in the rainforest. (Did I mention I got to live in the rainforest in the middle of Borneo? I am now only fully appreciating how awesome an opportunity that was!)



A typical day at the "office". Photo © Kat Scott.

I wrote this article on my final flight back to the United Kingdom. Taking stock of my feelings will take time, but I know for sure that working with GPOCP has changed me for the better. I would never have been offered the chance of a PhD with orangutans if it hadn't been for this job. I will miss everything about it dearly. All I can say is thank you for believing in me and allowing me to grow. Now I start the work towards earning my PhD studying orangutans. I cannot wait to walk in the footsteps of other powerful and influential female scientists before me. (Side-note: I would be lying if I said am going to miss the 3am starts but I will always miss the orangutans and people of Cabang Pantil!)



*Kat (left) with Witi and Beth Barrow at Cabang Pantil.
Photo © Kat Scott.*



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