

Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program



April 2017

Issue: 52

Code RED

An e-newsletter from your friends in West Kalimantan

Dear Friends and Supporters,

It is hard to believe, but we are already a quarter of the way through the year! With May just around the corner, we have lots of activities to share. Our first article is from Brodie Philp, our new Research Manager. He has finally arrived at Cabang Panti and shares some of his first experiences. Welcome to the team Brodie!

Our second story is about a week long training course we held in our Customary Forest villages. Here we trained local farmers and community leaders about agroforestry and methods to implement sustainable farming practices that also help restore peat land.

On our sidebar you will find information about just a few of our Earth Day activities. Our events incorporated nearly 1,000 members of the community throughout Ketapang and Kayong Utara.

Sincerely,

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Earth Day

Earth Day

We hope everyone had an exciting Earth Day on April 22nd. Here in West Kalimantan we

Cheryl Knott, PhD
Executive Director

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

Back to Borneo

By Brodie Philp, GPOCP Research Manager

Allow me to introduce myself. I'm Brodie, a 27-year-old Wildlife Ecologist from Adelaide, Australia. I have recently begun the position of research manager for GPOP (Gunung Palung Orangutan Project) at Cabang Panti Research Station. This is not my first stint in Borneo, previously I volunteered with Orangutan Foundation International as a release intern where I spent my days rehabilitating orphaned, sick and injured orangutans for release back into the wild. After almost three years back home in Australia, working as an adventure tour guide, koala catcher and turtle monitoring team leader, among other things, the calling of orangutans and Borneo was too much to resist when I saw this position advertised.

After several months preparing visa applications and working on travel preparations, I arrived in Ketapang in West Borneo. Here I spent the first few weeks working in our office, getting to know the staff and all the different aspects of our organization and finalizing preparations for heading into the forest. Ketapang is a lovely little city, but I was itching to head to the forest.

I have been at the research site for a few weeks now and have started to establish my work routine. The forest is bursting with life, and a unique combination of skill and luck means that each day is an exciting one due to the potential for what we might see when out searching for or following orangutans.

celebrated by hosting an Earth Day walk, sponsoring an event with speeches about the importance of a clean Earth and planting trees.



Youth of Sukadana preparing for their march for Earth Day.

Photo © GPOCP.



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Forward to a Friend

"When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world"



Brodie up before sunrise collecting orangutan fecal samples for analysis.

Camp is so beautiful. On the banks of the river that meanders past our main building I find myself getting distracted by the crystal clear running water, given that back home I come from the driest state on the driest continent. The morning light hits the forest canopy illuminating it in every shade of green possible and the light beams that make it through to the forest floor are defined by the moisture laden air. Forest surrounds all of camp so even on days spent in "the office" there is still the chance of seeing something truly remarkable. Hornbills plucking fruit from the tree tops, macaques having extended grooming sessions, flying lizards cruising past and gibbons giving their morning calls have all been visible from my desk window alone. But of course, there are some negative aspects of the job, such as plucking ticks off each other, finding leeches in all the wrong places, and battling an army of fire ants that migrates in and out of camp on a regular basis. But these are far outweighed by the potential unique experiences and sights each day brings.



A rat snake found lurking in the trees discovered while searching for orangutans.

It's easy to get constantly distracted by the beauty of Gunung Palung National Park, but there is work that needs to be done as well. Days spent following orangutans usually begin at 3:30 am to enable us to get to their nest before they wake up. And days finally end for me at around 11 pm after I have charged all the equipment up, and made sure everything is ready to use again the next day. Staff and volunteers are always coming and going from camp and it's my job to make sure they are up-to-date with all of our research methods and procedures. I have already held a training session with the staff to go over proper field methods and establish an understanding of everyone's roles and responsibilities for success of the project. I am hoping this can establish a good platform of understanding and open communication. Running a research station in a remote location also requires a great deal of planning and organizing of logistics to keep our equipment stocked and functioning, the facilities maintained and everybody fed and happy. The trek in and out of camp is 18 km so we can't head home after a day's work, therefore this role combines the need to manage research but also develop an understanding of personalities and an appropriate life and work balance as we live together 24/7.



Toto, Brodie, Sy and Dang trying to stay dry during a rain shower while searching for orangutans.

In terms of research, this year will have a heavy focus on mother and young pairs or "ibu anak" as they are referred to in Indonesian. In particular we are looking at comparisons of food intake and taking fecal samples to compare digestion rates, particle size and seed dispersal. During my first few weeks, we have managed to find a few pairs already. Given my previous work involved rehabilitating orangutans that were orphaned, it is amazing to gain further insight into the complex relationship a young orangutan has with his or her mother. The vast knowledge a mother shares with her young includes not only where to find fruit, but when to eat it, what part to eat, and how to eat it. Some fruits are best eaten ripe, others are best eaten when they are young so that the seeds within are still soft. I have never extensively studied botany, but have already learned quite a bit about the vast fruit types present in the forest. It is also fascinating to learn about how so many animals rely on these fruits and how the fruits rely on the animals for seed dispersal and pollination. Often fruits in the canopy are completely out of sight, but there are enormous feeding opportunities available in the forest if one knows where to look...and that's what mom is for.



*Baby orangutan, Ronnie, is starting to gain confidence and learn the ways of the forest with the help of his mom (not in picture).
Photo credits @ Brodie Philp.*

My initial introduction to the role has been a hectic one. There is a lot to learn and understand, and there are infinite opportunities for me to expand my knowledge and implement past experiences to try and make this project the best it can be. There will be frustrations and struggles along the way but as I sit looking out from that same desk window I am enthusiastic about what lies ahead.

Agroforestry and its Role in Land Transformation

By Terri Breeden, GPOCP Program Director

This month, GPOCP held its first (of many planned) activities with support from the Indonesia Climate Change Trust Fund (ICCTF). Throughout the next 18 months we will be working hand-in-hand with our recently established Customary Forest, or *Hutan Desa*, communities to build their capacity to sustainably manage their land. Our Customary Forest areas reside in Simpang Hilir and are made up of the villages of Nipah Kuning, Palau Kumbang, Padu Banjar, Pemangkat and Penjataan.

It is important to note that much of the land in this region is composed of deep peatland. Peatland is rich in carbon and plays a major role in climate change. Any disturbance to this land causes release of this stored carbon into the atmosphere, which can increase the effects of climate change. With

the average depth of peat in Simpang Hilir between three and four meters, it is important that members of these local communities become aware of the importance of this forest type. We want to teach them sustainable practices that will enable them to use this land to support their families while still safeguarding it. Agroforestry is a system which incorporates sustainable land use management where trees or shrubs are grown around or among crops or pastureland. This method of agriculture creates a more ecologically sound, diverse, productive and profitable land use system.



Wendy (center) giving a lesson in the field on how to measure the depth of the peat.

From April 6-12th, we held a series of trainings throughout the five villages. We called these workshops, *Training of the Trainer* or *ToT* for short. Our goal was to work directly with 75 local farmers, village heads and community members to build their knowledge of the potential uses of non-timber forest products (NTFPs), and to conduct coconut- and rubber-based agroforestry training. We want to build these particular members knowledge about these subjects so they can be the leaders and take initiative for these sustainable projects within their villages.

The series of trainings were implemented by Jusupta Tarigan, who goes by JT, from NTFP-EP Indonesia. He led discussions about the importance of peatlands and how to restore the areas that were devastated by the 2015 fires. The first training was held in Pemangkat and discussed peatland rehabilitation and NTFP plants. Participants were given basic materials about peat and how to restore these previously burned areas with plants such as Swamp Jelutung (*Dyera polyphylla*) which produces latex that can be used in chewing gum, and insulation, and the wood can be used for pulp, plywood, pencils and toys, and *Shorea* species that produce valuable wood. Other

suitable food crops, such as coconut, cocoa and pineapple were also discussed. *Pandan* and *rattan*, valuable plants for NTFPs are also considered high worth and suitable for agroforestry within the area. On the final day of the three day training in Pemangkat, the trainees were invited to visit an area of peatland that had been burned. The trainees were able to see how the fires had impacted their land and apply all of the information they learned during the peatland workshop.



Jusupta Tarigan, or JT, hosting a discussion about NTFPs and peat land restoration.

The next training was conducted in Pulau Kumbang and discussed coconut based agroforestry. This is an important topic for this community as 70% of the population are coconut farmers. JT began the course by discussing the history of forest destruction in Indonesia and explained that agroforestry has an important role in restoring the land back to pre-destruction times. He highlighted that peat areas must remain moist or wet to sustain cultivation. A way to help combat peat dehydration is to create a reservoir or pond area to store water. Often times, it also helps to plant trees outside of the peat area, so the roots can help conserve water within the peatlands. JT also suggested farmers work with two or more crops that have different harvest periods. For instance, coconuts can take up to eight years until ready to harvest, but if the farmer also plants bananas, they can have rotating crops that are ready to harvest year-round, creating a more balanced income for the farmer.

The final training was held in Padu Banjar and focused on rubber-based agroforestry. During this training JT recommended that farmers also have an

alternative crop. Rubber trees have different stages at which they are ready to harvest; also the price of rubber is rather variable. If the latter situation occurs, the farmers will have other sustainable crops to harvest while waiting for the price of rubber to rise again. He recommended pineapple, *jengkol* (or dogfruit) or other fruit crops such as *rambutan* and *durian*.



A group working to develop a plan on how to implement the information they learned into their community Customary Forest. All photos credit @ GPOCP.

All participants were also invited to develop a follow-up plan to restore the peatland and burned fields with suitable and economically productive plants. JT emphasized that it is important to restore the land with native plants, but these plants can also provide an income. This area has high potential for agroforestry and the native plants to be used can create future assets, rehabilitate the land, and they also require less labor. Agroforestry product prices are also only predicted to increase. Every participant gained valuable knowledge from their respective

workshops. Each village is dedicated to creating a follow-up plan with the information learned. Wendy Tamariska, our Sustainable Livelihoods Manager stated during the closing of the series of activities, "hopefully, with this training, we will see the farmers planting economically valuable crops that can become a sustainable source of income for the community, and these plants can restore the land to reduce the threat of fire."

Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program (GPOCP)

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