

Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program



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An e-newsletter from your friends in West Kalimantan

Dear Friends and Supporters,

Time flies! It's almost time for the school year to end and summer to start. As I prepare for my annual trip to the field, I can't wait to follow orangutans again and witness first-hand our conservation and research teams in action. This month we give you an update on our Community Forest, or *Hutan Desa*, program, which has made great progress over the past 8-10 months. In our second article, Research Assistant Agus Trianto shares his hypotheses on why the research team has had a difficult time finding flanged male orangutans lately. Don't forget to watch the video!

We are also happy to announce the publication of our 2015 Annual Report, which can be accessed using the links in the right-hand column. Finally, I urge each of you to mark your calendars and get your smartphones ready for June 3rd, when GPOCP will once again take part in #RainforestLive. We are looking forward to sharing photos and videos live from Cabang Panti research station, so you all can experience the biodiversity and amazing natural habitats that we work in every day. Don't hesitate to post your own rainforest photos and tag us on social media, and we will share your posts!

Sincerely,

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Cheryl Knott

Cheryl Knott, PhD
Executive Director

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

All Hands on Deck for *Hutan Desa*

By Cassie Freund, GPOCP Program Director

The Community Forest Initiative, or *Hutan Desa*, as it is known in Indonesia, is one of GPOCP's core orangutan conservation programs. For the past two years we have been working with over 90 people in five villages to the north of Gunung Palung National Park, helping them through the process of obtaining the legal management rights to approximately 7,500 hectares of peat swamp forest. Our goal is to protect these forests from conversion for outside economic interests, such as oil palm, while simultaneously allowing local communities access to the myriad of benefits that come from living near a healthy rainforest. Through this strategy, we will also conserve thousands of hectares of crucial orangutan habitat in the Gunung Palung landscape. Part of this work is legal in nature, as there is a long bureaucratic process involved in securing a *Hutan Desa*. Another significant part of the program is capacity building for the Community Forest participants so that when they do receive the forest management rights, they have the knowledge and skills necessary to protect and conserve these lands.



GPOCP Program Manager, Edi Rahman, presents sustainable forest management guidelines at a training session in February.

Over the past eight months, supported primarily by funding from the Arcus Foundation and the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) Conservation Grants Fund, we have made substantial progress on all aspects of the Community Forest Initiative. First, we have designed a series of four sustainable forest management trainings for representatives from all five project villages. The first two sessions were held in February and April of this year, and focused on forest fires, sustainable management of peat swamp forests, and human-wildlife conflict. These trainings resulted in a public declaration, issued by the village heads and co-signed by GPOCP, International Animal Rescue, and the local Natural Resources Conservation Agency, that the communities will commit to preventing forest fires and illegal killing of wildlife in the *Hutan Desa* project area. This is a significant, concrete recognition of the importance of conservation by the five project villages. The third training of the series, which will teach participants

an amazing and productive year for our conservation and research teams in West Kalimantan. We are very pleased to share all of our milestones and successes with you, our loyal supporters and friends, through our 2015 Annual Report. The report can be [accessed online](#), and a downloadable copy is available [here](#).



#RainforestLive 2016: June 3rd

It's that time again! On June 3rd, GPOCP will be participating in Rainforest Live, a social media campaign to raise awareness about rainforest research and conservation. We'll be Tweeting, Facebook-ing, and Instagramming posts from both the research and conservation teams all day using the hashtag [#RainforestLive](#). Other participants include OuTrop, Selamatkan Yaki, the Sumatran Orangutan Conservation Program, and many others. Follow us on our social media pages using the buttons below so you don't miss a post! To see last year's top Rainforest Live posts, visit the event's [Storify page](#).



how to effectively zone their forests for sustainable management, was held on May 30th.

The Kayong Utara regency government has enthusiastically supported our *Hutan Desa* work, with the stipulation that these villages benefit economically from their commitment to forest protection. To fulfill this need, we have begun integrating our Sustainable Livelihoods programs into the Community Forest program. Currently, we are performing Participatory Rural Assessments (PRAs) in each village to discern the level of commitment from each community. Our Sustainable Livelihoods projects are built on community participation, and without buy-in and dedication from villagers, our various livelihoods strategies (i.e. organic agriculture, Non-Timber Forest Product handicrafting, and fish farming) will not have a significant conservation impact. Each PRA lasts for approximately four days and includes socialization of our programs and a community meeting to discuss potential livelihood strategies. Thus far, two of the three villages we have surveyed are enthusiastic about becoming part of our Sustainable Livelihoods program, and the remaining two PRAs are scheduled for June and July.



Sustainable Livelihoods Manager, Wendy Tamariska, presents our livelihoods strategies at a meeting as part of the Participatory Rural Assessment in Pemangkat village, Kayong Utara regency.

Finally, I am pleased to share that this month we also completed the first-ever rapid biodiversity surveys in the Paduan River community forest area, which encompasses four of the five *Hutan Desa* project villages. These surveys, led by GPOCP Environmental Education Coordinator (and resident botanist!) Edward Tang, focused on the diversity of tree species present in this approximately 6,000-hectare peat swamp forest. Tang and his team cataloged the trees present in 100 forest plots, spread across 10 survey transects throughout the forest. Preliminary results suggest that, although portions of this area were degraded by the 2015 forest fires, healthy rainforest, containing dozens of orangutan food species, is still present in much of the area. The team also observed and counted orangutan nests, which should help us come up with a more accurate estimate of the size of the orangutan population in this forest. We aim to complete the analysis of the rapid survey data and produce a full report before the end of June, which will be shared with the Kayong Utara Department of Forestry, the project villages, and other relevant stakeholders.

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Forward to a Friend

"Plans to protect air and water, wilderness and wildlife, are in fact plans to protect man."

-Stewart L. Udall-



Edward Tang and a team from Nipah Kuning village collect tree diversity data from one of 10 total transects surveyed as part of the rapid survey in the Paduan River community forest area.

GPOCP's Community Forest Initiative is a great demonstration of our comprehensive approach to orangutan conservation. By integrating community forestry and capacity building with sustainable livelihoods, environmental education, and scientific research efforts, we are well on our way to protecting over 7,000 hectares of forest in the Gunung Palung National Park landscape. This coming week our legal documents and the official *Hutan Desa* proposal will be ratified by the Kayong Utara regency head, after which it will be sent to the national Ministry of Forestry for final approval. After nearly two years of coordinating and promoting this strategy with the local Department of Forestry and the Gunung Palung National Park Bureau, we are confident that our conservation efforts will succeed, creating an immense positive impact on both the orangutans and people that inhabit the *Hutan Desa* project area. We would like to sincerely thank all of our funders who support this work, including the Arcus Foundation, AZA, the Woodland Park Zoo, and the Conservation, Food and Health Foundation.

The Case of the Missing Flanged Males

By Agus Trianto, Botanical Research Assistant

Last fall, especially the months of October and November, were very interesting months at Cabang Panti Research Station. During this

period, we found a total of five flanged male orangutans in our study area. Almost every day we could hear long calls, and we even heard them at night when we were getting ready to sleep - usually prompted by tree falls or other loud animal noises. Because our site is actually quite large, extending over 2,100 hectares of relatively pristine rainforest, hearing long calls from our camp is relatively rare and so we felt lucky to be able to hear these every night.



*Male orangutan long calling in Gunung Palung National Park
(Video © Tim Laman)*

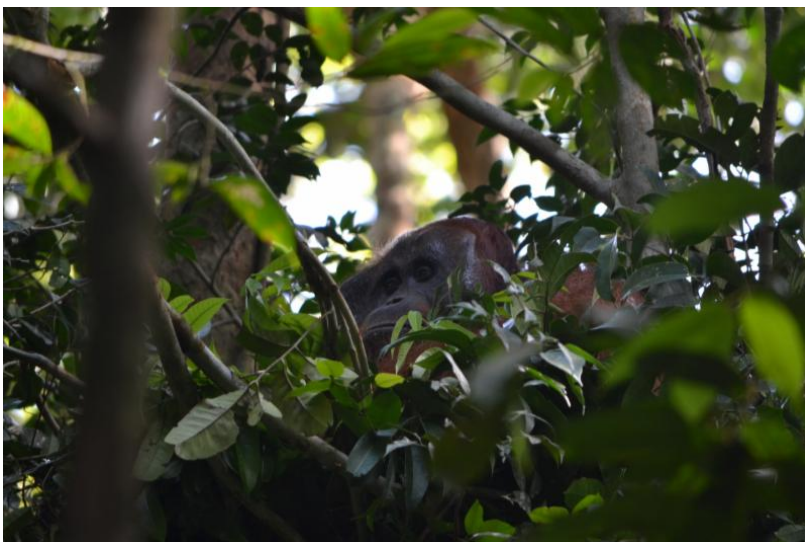
While we were following these flanged males, we even saw them come into close proximity with one another. They usually met in or near a large fruiting tree, or sometimes while following a female. However, despite coming within several meters of each other, sizing one another up, and trading long calls, we never saw any fights break out. One of the males, the less dominant one, would always drop to the ground and run away. This presented us with a wealth of information on the dominance hierarchy in Cabang Panti, and is something we want to explore further in our data.

Now, as I write this, it's been almost a month and a half since we have seen or followed a flanged male. The last individual that we followed was Alfred, in March, and before that, in January, we found and followed Prabu. On one of the days we followed Alfred, we also met another flanged male who came within 10 meters of us! However, this close proximity was quickly interrupted by Alfred's bellowing long-call, which sent the other male running in the opposite direction.



Flanged male orangutan, Prabu, watches over the forest canopy for intruders to his territory.

This near-lack of flanged males lies in stark contrast to our findings last fall. We haven't heard any long calls, and everything is quiet. It feels like there are no flanged males anywhere in the forest. This is very interesting, and is one of the reasons that we are so eager to find out where flanged male orangutans go when they are not in our study site - a question being investigated now by [Robert Rodriguez-Suro's project](#). This lack of males is likely linked to the lack of fruit we have had in Cabang Panti since January. The research site covers eight different forest types: alluvial bench, freshwater peat, peat swamp, *kerangas*, lowland sandstone, lowland granite, upland granite, and montane. Generally, trees in the different habitat types fruit at different times and the orangutans rotate through the different habitat types in accordance with fruit availability. While the end of 2015 brought an abundance of fruiting trees of many different species, such as the *Chaetocarpus* that dominated our orangutans' diets in December, since then Cabang Panti has had little to offer orangutans. In contrast, people living in the villages bordering the National Park have reported seeing orangutans closer to their villages, feeding on the wild fruit trees in the outer peat swamp forests.



Flanged male orangutan, Codet, relaxes in his nest. Codet's territory spans most of Cabang Panti research site, and he is therefore one of our most followed male orangutans.

Another potential explanation or factor in why it has been so difficult to find

male orangutans lately is that when fruit availability is low, it seems that the males reduce their long call frequency. One function of long calls is to signal a flanged male's position to other males in the forest, but when fruit availability is low, the risk of running into rivals foraging in the same area decreases, and it appears that the males long call less in this case. For example, when we followed Alfred for four days in March, he only long called 1-2 times per day, but during our follow in December, when the *Chaetocarpus* was heavily fruiting, he called 4-5 times per day. Oddly enough, despite being very large with long red fur, orangutans can be fairly cryptic. Therefore, if they don't make any noise, they are very difficult to find.

Cabang Panti differs from other field sites in Kalimantan in that the forest that we work in remains relatively continuous. While a blessing for the orangutans, it can make it harder for researchers to follow them once they leave the study area, as this is a very common occurrence. As we continue to collect data on orangutan ranging patterns and food availability, as well as other variables, we hope that we can further understand male orangutan movement. But for now we just have to keep searching!

Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program (GPOCP)

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