

# Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program



November 2017

Issue: 59

## Code RED

An e-newsletter from your friends in West Kalimantan

Dear Friends and Supporters,

I hope all of you that celebrated Thanksgiving had a wonderful holiday, full of delicious food! It is hard to believe this year is winding down and the holiday season is fully upon us.

Yet again, we had another busy month here in West Kalimantan. Our first article is by our Environmental Education Manager, Mariamah Achmad, and her trip to Germany to attend the People's Climate Summit. She was able to spend 10 days there and spread awareness about the activities of GPOCP!

The second article is about some of our busy

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orangutans at Cabang Panti. Walimah has made quite a few appearances along with a few unflanged males. Learn about the latest happenings with the GP orangutans from Research Manager Brodie Philp.

On our side bar you can find more information about [#OrangutanCaringWeek2017](#). Be sure to check out our social media for more information. Also our head artisan, Ibu Ida, recently received an award for her environmental stewardship from the President of Indonesia. And please don't forget us this holiday season. It is easy to support GPOCP by shopping through [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com) or by checking out our [website](#).

Finally, if you are in the Washington DC area, I will be giving a talk at the [National Geographic Society](#) on December 6 with my husband, [Tim Laman](#), on "Adventures Among Orangutans." Please join us to learn more about these amazing animals!

Sincerely,



Cheryl Knott, PhD  
Executive Director  
[Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program \(GPOCP\)](#)

## GPOCP Goes to Germany

*By Mariamah Achmad, GPOCP Environmental Education Manager*

I just had the experience of a lifetime! For the past two decades I have been an activist on behalf of the environment and women's rights and was thrilled to be invited to attend the People's Climate Summit in Germany. FAMM Indonesia (the Young Indonesian Youth Activist Forum) and JASS Southeast Asia - organizations working to strengthen the capacity of and empower young women activists - were kind enough to financially support my eventful journey. The process started with an interview and a week later I found out I would soon be on my way to Frankfurt, Bonn, and Bruehl, Germany! It took a lot of coordination to obtain the visas and legal documents in such a

## #Orangutan Caring Week 2017

This year's Orangutan Caring Week was held November 12th-18th and GPOCP's youth groups worked hard to put together events for youngsters throughout the region. In Pontianak, our scholarship students (BOCS) visited a local orphanage to talk about orangutans and in Kayong Utara our students put on a coloring contest, theatrical drama, and mobile cinema event!



## Meet the President

This month, our head artisan, Ibu Ida, received an award for her environmental stewardship from the President of Indonesia. We are proud of the progress Ibu Ida has made and she is a great role model. Congratulations Ibu Ida!

short period of time, but I will be ever grateful for this opportunity.



*Mariamah (right) participating in the Climate March in Bonn, Germany. Photo credit Survival Media.*

These environmental events took place November 3-10, 2017. The first day started with the Pacific Climate Warriors, a Fiji based organization working to bring awareness about the effects of climate change. The Pacific Islands have been heavily impacted by rising sea levels and temperature changes. Thus, this organization had strong motivational words for the world to hear: We are not drowning, we are fighting! The second day was the 23rd Conference of Parties March (COP23) whose thematic focus was bringing awareness about coal mining and climate justice. Over 350 organizations from around the world were represented in the march! On the third day, we visited a fossil fuel mine that has dug up 4,000 hectares of land, 450 meters deep! It was as though the earth had been scraped clean for all she is worth. The expanse of this devastation was hard to look at, much less put into words.



*Mariamah visiting one of the largest open pit mines in the world in Germany. Photo credit Zephania Repollo.*



#NatGeoDC

Friends in the Washington, D.C. area please join my husband, Dr. Tim Laman, and myself as we discuss the trials and tribulations of studying wild orangutans on December 6th at the National Geographic Society. We look forward to seeing you there!



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The next few days, I attended a variety of workshops about climate, food, energy, justice, and women's rights. Here I was able to speak about the challenges we face in Indonesia and how we can fight climate change as a world movement, as well as ensure women's rights. I spoke about how traditionally women would forage for fruits and vegetables in the forest, fish the local rivers, and care for their families. Now, many of these forests have been replaced by oil palm plantations and mines, or have been illegally logged. These changes have altered the land and polluted the water, affecting both humans and animals. These women can no longer gather the food to feed their families. In order for Indonesian women to purchase produce and other goods, they must now work outside of the home, sometimes leaving their children with a neighbor or with little to no adult supervision. Because of the chemicals being used on these industrial plantations, the water is no longer clean enough to drink and causes severe skin reactions when used to bathe. These drastic land changes have strained families economically, socially, and culturally, and have compromised their health.



*Mariamah giving a talk about the land changes throughout Indonesia and its impact on livelihoods. Photo credit Zephane Repollo.*

I was able to share GPOCP's success stories, including our environmental education program, where we reach over 5,000 students per year teaching them the importance of a healthy environment. I also discussed our work with the local community to legally protect 7,500 hectares

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*"As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them"*

*-John F. Kennedy-*

of forest, which prevents large scale agriculture firms from encroaching onto this land. These protected forests also serve to safeguard the community through natural environmental services, such as carbon sequestration and water filtration.

These ten days in Germany flew by, but it was such an honor to represent GPOCP, women of Indonesia and to march alongside climate activists from around the globe. I would sincerely like to thank FAMM Indonesia, JASS, and GPOCP for their motivation, support, and believing in me. I have made friends with like-minded people from around the globe and have a renewed sense of hope for the world in which we live.



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*Mariamah participating in the People's Climate Summit in Bonn, Germany. Photo credit Survival Media.*

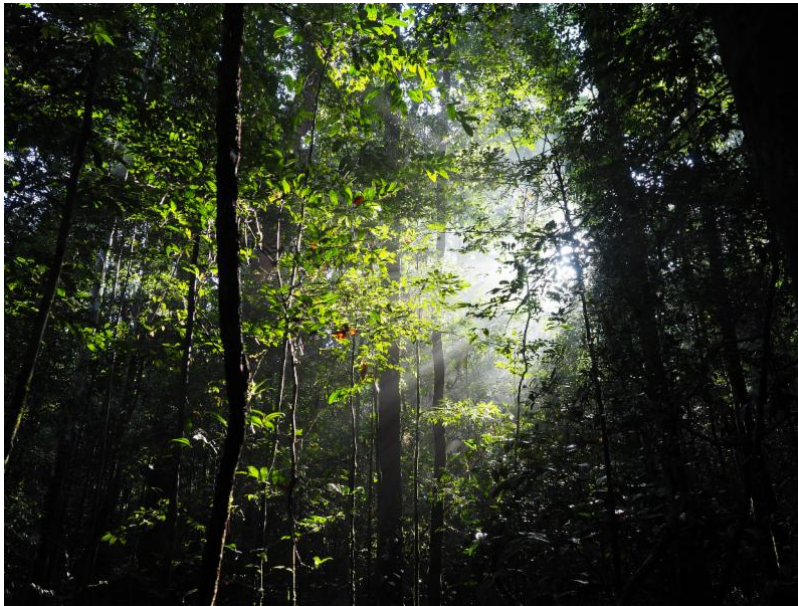
## **Drama in the Forest**

*By Brodie Philp, GPOCP Research Manager*

The forest in Gunung Palung National Park is ever changing. Through our daily searches and follows one becomes very familiar with every area of the forest. During our nightly meetings the status of one single tree in this vast rainforest can be discussed as if it were a person that everyone on the research team has known for years. For an even broader perspective, we can consult our extensive phenological records on tree fruiting patterns to see what is happening with certain species or to examine large-scale habitat variation over time.

One aspect of orangutan behavior that has

remained constant for a majority of the last 6 months has been the popularity of the freshwater and peat swamp habitats. These were the places to be! The orangutans seemed to be drawn there and thus our follows focused heavily in these areas as well - until recently that is. Of late the mountainous habitat surrounding Cabang Panti Research Station has started to fruit with multiple species. With plentiful *Willughbeia*, *Baccaurea* and *Irvingia*, some of our resident orangutans have started to head upslope to forage and we've also had the pleasure of seeing individuals that haven't made an appearance for quite a while.



*Morning light shining through the thick tree canopy at Cabang Panti Research Station in Gunung Palung National Park. Photo credit Brodie Philp.*

A particular point of interest is the number of unflanged males we have been seeing. Our resident flanged male, Alfred, has not been seen for some time, although we still hear his long calls, deep in the swamp. This seems to have given the unflanged males a new opportunity! These males without cheek pads tend to be very nomadic as they travel in search of food and females. With Alfred absent, we have seen four unflanged males in close proximity to camp. Is this due to fruiting on the mountain? Is it due to Alfred's absence? Or could there be something else enticing them to hang around more in these areas?

One common factor in nearly all of these follows has been an adult female orangutan, Walimah. Walimah is one of our most studied females; in fact, she has been followed since birth! Back in

2015, she became quite well known when she was featured in the Nat Geo Wild episode "Mission Critical: Orangutans on the Edge". The program documented Walimah's serious foot injury and loss of her infant. While this was a devastating event for her, as well as for the research team, it has given us an interesting opportunity to observe her behavior after this rare infant loss. Orangutans are known for their slow life history, having the longest inter-birth interval of any mammal, around 6-8 years. Their infants rarely die - in fact this was our first known infant death at Cabang Panti (see *Code Red* from April 2016 to learn what happened to her). Normally, females willingly start mating again when their current offspring is nearing independence. But with Walimah losing her baby so suddenly, we have been waiting to see how long it would take her to physically recover and conceive again.

Our research methods allow us to see changes in Walimah's health through analyzing chemicals and hormones in her urine. We can also observe her behavior and social interactions with other orangutans. When I first followed Walimah back in April she was annoying a mother orangutan. The mother kept kiss squeaking at Walimah as she moved closer to her baby, apparently wanting to interact with it. We can only imagine the thoughts going through the mind of this intelligent animal as she approached another orangutan's baby, after losing her own.





*Research field assistant, Toto, collecting a urine sample.  
Photo copyright Tim Laman.*

Recently, however, it has been Walimah's interactions with males that have been the most intriguing. She started mating again soon after she lost her infant, but we've been eagerly waiting for her to conceive again. Last month we saw Walimah being followed by two separate males for several days each. One was Mr. Kecil (or Mr. Small in English) who spent a lot of time close to her. The anticipation was high amongst the field assistants each time they edged closer. When Walimah would sit on a branch he would slowly climb down and sit next to her for a few seconds before he climbed off again. During this period, despite their close association, nothing happened. Even sitting next to each other sharing a termite-filled log wasn't enough to ignite a spark!





*Bosman checking on the whereabouts of Walimah. Photo credit Brodie Philp.*

A few weeks later, we found Walimah with another male, Bosman. It wasn't long before Bosman's intentions were clear and our assistants observed them mating. Hassan, our longest serving field assistant, happily walked into camp with a video recording of the event. The next day, I was with Hassan in the forest and it happened again. The mating seemed pretty mutual between the two of them, although I must say Walimah didn't look too interested during the event. She was seen reaching out and pulling leaves off a branch and swinging around a small twig, in what could only be described as boredom, as Bosman went about his business. The two continued to travel and feed together for several more days before mating for a third time. These events were recorded so we can analyze their mating behavior and body language down to the smallest detail, even documenting the number of thrusts involved. Will these recent interactions with Bosman lead to a pregnancy? Sounds more like a sentence from a TV drama than wildlife research - but let's hope so!

From here on out we will carry pregnancy tests in our field gear to test Walimah's urine during our upcoming follows. Regardless of the results, it is an interesting time to continue following Walimah and expand our intricate knowledge of this orangutan's life.



*Walimah, the most studied orangutan at Cabang Panti.  
Photo copyright Tim Laman.*

Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program (GPOCP)

<http://saveGPorangutans.org>

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