

Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program



June 2019

Issue: 78

Code RED

An e-newsletter from your friends in West Kalimantan

Dear Friends and Supporters,

June has been a busy month for me as I finalize my preparations for my annual trip to Indonesia. I am excited to catch up with the staff and, of course, see Walimah's new baby!

This issue of *Code Red* features an article by Terri Breeden. After being based in Ketapang for almost 3 years as Program Director, Terri has decided to return home to the US but is continuing to help the organization grow as our new Development Director. Our second article is by one of our laboratory assistants, Muhammad Syainullah (Syai), based at Cabang Panti Research Station. Syai shares his impressions of our dominant male, Alfred, and his reign over Cabang Panti.

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On our sidebar we have a brief update about our orangutan population survey, as well as notes about how our new goats are helping orangutans and how we celebrated World Rainforest Day. I also wanted to share this beautiful image captured by our Survey Coordinator, Elizabeth Barrow, near the peak of Mount Palung during one of our recent surveys.



View from Mount Palung taken by our Survey Coordinator, Elizabeth Barrow, during a mountain transect.

Sincerely,

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

Adventures in Borneo: My Three Years Abroad

By Terri Breeden, GPOCP Development Director

It is hard to believe that I have spent the past three years living in Borneo! Leaving the comforts of home and moving to the other side of the world was one of the hardest decisions I have ever made in my life, but I am so happy I did it. It was a whirlwind when I think back to when I was first offered the position. Within a month I had sold all of my belongings, put my keepsakes in storage, and took the long flights from the US to Jakarta, and then another two flights from

Orangutan Population Survey

Our survey team has been hard at work counting orangutan nests! We are collecting these data to give us an updated population estimate for Gunung Palung National Park. This year we are using new technology to help us along the way. DRONES!

So far, we have completed 8 transects within Cabang Panti. We have had some delays due to weather and a high number of nests (up to 95 on one transect)!



Survey team heading into the field. Photo by Elizabeth Barrow.

Once the ground team finishes up, we fly the drone over those same areas so that we can compare the estimates. Last week we flew the drones from the outskirts of GPNP over all 8 transects and it all went without a hitch.

The plan is to go back to the field June 17th to survey 7 more transects. We will keep you updated as this project

Jakarta to Ketapang, West Kalimantan.

As I think back on my time here, it is hard to choose a favorite memory. I had so many adventures from trekking in the jungle, tubing down the rivers, cruising on my motorbike through small villages, and working with the different school groups. My heart is full when I reminisce about how I was welcomed into homes, people wanting to know about my life back in the US, and why I moved to West Kalimantan! One of my first and favorite memories was cruising down the river and being mesmerized by the wildlife. I saw so many macaques, hornbills, proboscis monkeys, and my first wild orangutan!



Terri's first sighting of a wild orangutan in West Kalimantan. Photo by Erik Sulidra.

Another favorite memory is my first visit to Cabang Panti Research Station. I made the hike in with Becky Curtis (former research assistant and Assistant Manager) and Syai (lab assistant, see article below). I wore big rubber boots that were too large and too heavy for my feet so I was completely exhausted by the time I made the 14 km journey to camp. But once I reached the view of that suspension bridge, all the pain went away. The camp is nestled in the heart of Gunung Palung National Park and feels like a scene out of Swiss

progresses...



Drone team preparing to fly over GPNP. Photo by Elizabeth Barrow.

Goats for Conservation!

Goats for Conservation? At the core of wildlife conservation is creating long-term solutions and strategies that benefit both humans and wildlife.



One of the heads of our Customary Forest Management boards, Pak Edi, with the 20 adorable new goats! Photo credit Edi Rahman.

Our Customary Forest Management group were very generously given 20 goats by the local Forestry Ministry to help provide additional sustainable economic options that will help decrease deforestation and hunting as the goats provide meat, dairy

Family Robinson. I spent the next few days exploring the forest, enjoying the wildlife, and not wanting to go back to a world of internet, emails, and text messages.



Terri (center) with some of the researchers, managers, field assistants and national park staff during her first visit to Cabang Panti Research Station. Photo credit GPOCP.

I hope that my time with GPOCP was as beneficial to the staff and organization as it was for my own growth. Over the last few years, because of our great teamwork, GPOCP was able to make a positive impact to each of our program areas including educating over 6,000 youth and adults per year about the importance of wildlife and habitat conservation, bringing our legally protected Customary Forests total up to nearly 10,000 hectares, converting 50 illegal loggers and miners into organic farmers and artisans, and reporting on and rescuing 12 orangutans per year from dangerous situations. I have also made lifelong friends and family and we all share a special bond relating to conservation, Indonesia, and a life filled with adventure. While I am no longer physically working on the ground in Indonesia, I am happy to continue contributing to the organization through fundraising and spreading awareness. It has been quite a shock to be back in the United States... for one, everyone here keeps complaining of the heat, but to me it feels quite nice after the equatorial humidity of the tropical rainforest!

and even fertilizer to help optimize agriculture yields and thus limiting the need for further expansion of agriculture into prime orangutan habitat.



Housing just for the goats!

These goats were given to our Customary Forest group in the Pulau Kumbang village, and were received with much excitement and a beautiful structure built just for them to keep them safe at night and from floods. The support for the local villages, farmers and agroforestry initiatives by the Forestry Ministry was due to GPOCP's Customary Forest Program Manager, Edi Rahman's, hard work in community development. Kudos to Edi and the team!

World Rainforest Day

This year we have proudly partnered again with World Rainforest Day to help raise awareness and funds, and to share



*The GPOCP staff and volunteers together for a dinner.
Photo credit Simon Tampubolon.*

From the bottom of my heart I want to thank everyone at GPOCP, Dr. Cheryl Knott, and all of our collaborators, colleagues, and my friends in Ketapang. Indonesia will always hold a special place in my heart. So, while I may be in the US for now, I know I will be back in the future. Something about this country pulls at you and makes you come back again and again. No trip is ever the same and each one is full of new adventures!

Alfred, the Rightful King!

By Muhammad Syainullah, GPOCP Lab Assistant

Hi, my name is Muhammad Syainullah, but I go by Syai. I am a laboratory assistant at the Cabang Panti Research Station, in Gunung Palung National Park. Our project focuses on the behavior and physiology of wild orangutans. One of the orangutans we study is Alfred, or as I call him, not only the King, but the Legitimate King! I call him this because I met Alfred when I first started working at Cabang Panti and to this day, he remains the dominate male in the area.

educational resources about rainforests all around the world!



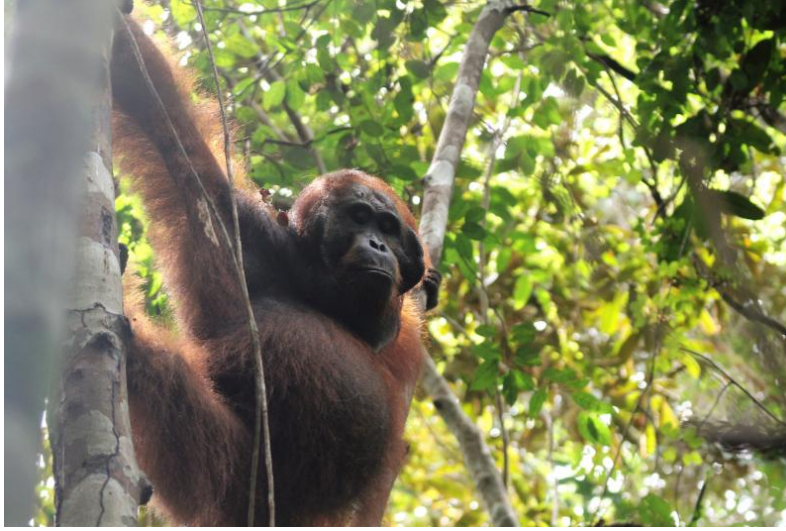
"Rainforests help regulate global temperatures. As carbon sinks, rainforests are one of our best defenses against climate change." Infograpic from World Rainforest Day.

The World Land Trust have some brilliant educational videos about rainforests we recommend, and the World Rainforest Day website has lots more material, such as [coloring pages](#) for kids.



Our dedicated volunteers in Kayong Utara planting mangroves seedlings for Earth Day 2019.

From GPOCP, we have decided to host another tree planting event, as a follow up from the Earth day event where over 320 mangrove trees were planted by our volunteers! Follow-up monitoring of the planted trees



Alfred, the primary dominant male in the Cabang Panti trail system.

We estimate that Alfred is between 25 and 30 years old. It is difficult to determine the age of wild male orangutans. Males tend to leave their mother, and her home range, and travel to a new home range around the time of puberty. This pattern is called 'male dispersal,' and it is very common in primates. When one sex disperses at puberty, it keeps closely related kin from mating with each other. Because, male orangutans disperse, we cannot be sure how old an adult male is when we first see him in our study system. Alfred was first seen in the Cabang Panti study area in April of 2015. At that time, he already had large flanges with scars on them. In captivity (where male age is known), most males have been seen to develop flanges from 9 to 18 years of age, but some never develop them and remain unflanged their whole lives! This is an unusual phenomenon in mammals called male bi-maturism. So there is a lot of variation in the age at which males could develop these flanges! Since Alfred already had flanges, and he had flanges for a long enough time to get into at least one fight with another male that wounded him and created scars, the research team estimated his age to be at least twenty or twenty-five when he was first seen.

revealed that 60% took root and survived, so this action will aim to manage and supplement the current seedlings with at least 100 new ones!

Adventures Among Orangutans: NAT GEO LIVE Tour!

GPOCP Executive Director, Dr. Cheryl Knott, and her husband, wildlife photojournalist Dr. Tim Laman, are on a world tour with NAT GEO LIVE! to give talks about their adventures among the orangutans in Gunung Palung over the past 30 years!



Visit the [NAT GEO LIVE](https://natgeolive.com/tours/adventures-among-orangutans) website to learn the tour dates and locations, and come hear about orangutan conservation first-hand.



Donate



A close up of Alfred and his flanges.

One day, while searching for orangutans in the forest, I was excited to find a young female. I was preparing to follow her, when I realized that Alfred was right behind her! Even though he is quite habituated to us following him, and wild orangutans do not attack observers, I was still intimidated to be that close. Flanged males weigh approximately 60-85 kg and travel terrestrially more often than other orangutans. Since I was new to the project and less experienced being around such large creatures, I immediately backed away from him to respect his space. (When following orangutans, we always keep a safe distance of at least 10 meters, for the safety of both the human observers and the orangutan.)



Syai searching for orangutans in the Cabang Panti trail system of Gunung Palung National Park. Photo by Muhammad Syainullah.



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"You should sit in nature for 20 minutes a day... Unless you are busy, then you should sit for an hour."

Old zen meditation

One of the things I find most fascinating is how long Alfred has remained the primary male in the Cabang Panti trail system. He has been the dominant male here the whole time that I have been at CPRS. We see many flanged males throughout the year in the study system, but Alfred is the one we see the most. During the most recent mast fruiting event, there was one day in which 6 different males were seen or heard (by the location of their long calls) all within one hour in the study system!

Over the last couple of years, I have learned many interesting things about Alfred, about his kingdom, and about other orangutans. But the biggest lesson of all is that we must protect orangutan habitat to protect the species!

Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program (GPOCP)

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Orangutan Photographs © Tim Laman
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