

Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program



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An e-newsletter from your friends in West Kalimantan

Dear Friends and Supporters,

Lots of activities and changes have happened in November! Tim and I just got back from the Montier Photo Festival in Montier-en-Der, France, where we were thrilled to share our conservation work, research and photography with a European audience.

In our first article, Victoria Gehrke, looks at GPOCP's growth by comparing our activities in 2009 to 2019 as part of the #10YearChallenge. Our second article comes from PhD Candidate Andrea Blackburn about her research in Cabang Panti, having just finished up a year in the forest investigating the role of orangutans as seed dispersers. We will miss her in the forest!

On our sidebar, we share some triumphant news from

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**Matching
Donations for
Giving Tuesday**

our Customary Forest program, as well as an update about our [Giving Tuesday campaign](#) to make your donations reach further!

We hope you enjoy catching up on what we've been doing and we look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,



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

#10YearChallenge

By Victoria Gehrke, Conservation Program Director

This year, a humorous, yet somewhat eye opening photo challenge rippled across the internet where you compare something from 2009 to 2019. In short, the #10YearChallenge (hopefully) shows your growth and improvement, and reminds you to never forget your humble beginnings and that time literally flies.

The international conservation community joined the challenge as well, showing the detrimental changes over the last 10 years in terms of land use, landscape development, and climate change. These images of deforestation, glaciers melting, plastic bottles not breaking down, and starving polar bears showed how much has changed in only 10 years and highlighted the strong need for immediate action towards sustainable socio-economic development and wildlife conservation.

For our Giving Tuesday campaign, we now have a generous donor that has promised to match donations up to \$1,500 this year for Giving Tuesday!

So make your donation twice as powerful by donating during this Giving Tuesday season - now through December 3rd!.



Baby Winnie photographed by Tim Laman just this fall!

Double Win for our Customary Forests

Our Customary Forest of Penjataan planted over 2000 seedlings thanks to the support of The Ministry of Forestry, who also helped establish tree nurseries to grow more seedlings!



Tree planting for land rehabilitation, Penjataan village.

Another 8,000 seedlings are scheduled to be planted in December across our Customary Forests of Nipah



Field trip in 2009 with students to Gunung Palung National Park, open field camp Lubuk Baji.

Without taking away any of the important messages and stark warnings that the #10YearChallenge has delivered regarding environmental issues, especially for the general public, we wanted to join this challenge on a smaller scale for our own positive spin for a #10YearChallengeInConservation. We took on this reflection as a precursor for our upcoming 20-year conservation impact analysis for GPOCP's 20 years as an in-situ conservation organization.

The Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program started in 1999, and by 2009 we were reaching 1,300+ students annually through environmental education activities including field trips, lectures, puppet shows and special events. Ten years later, in 2019, GPOCP has steadily expanded to ensure high quality environmental education outreach to directly engage over 8,218 students and adults in the GP landscape through 180 activities (so far just this year). We have expanded to include four annual week-long environmental education expeditions to remote communities that would otherwise not receive visits from local NGOs.

This year, we have reached 3,157 people through these expeditions, where the team hosts puppet shows, lectures, mobile cinema events, and community discussions to understand the problems faced by both people and wildlife in the area. Our strategy, across all our programs, has always been to listen, understand and adapt to create realistic long-term local solutions to wildlife conservation. We, then work hard to follow up with those communities to facilitate change with an open dialogue.

Kuning, Pemangkat, Palau Kumbang and Padu Banjar!



Tree seedling nursery in Padu Banjar.

The Ministry of Forestry support also allowed the Customary Forest groups to acquire some long awaited equipment for processing Non-Timber Forestry Products.

Penjalaan village received a coffee processing machine, as well as machinery to help produce coconut crafts for sale and use!



Proud Customary Forest Management Board of Pemangkat with their new equipment...



...to make coconut shell items such as this teapot set!

Local and national government agencies are turning their attention more and more towards our small working groups. After witnessing the

In addition to those reached by the above programs, we work directly with local youth over long periods of time. We currently have two active volunteer groups of over 50 members who go on field trips, host special events and help with education outreach. Our Bornean Orangutan Caring Scholarship (another new program within the last decade!) supports local college students. In collaboration with Orang Utan Republik Foundation, we have fully funded 30 students to complete university degrees and have 7 graduates all working in conservation. Four of them were recruited back to work with GPOCP - it's a natural choice when we know exactly how great they are!



#10YearChallenge with numbers for our Environmental Education program, and 2019 isn't even over yet!

In 2009, we identified 25 individual wild animals being held illegally for the pet trade, with 17 of those leading to confiscations. Animals were held in our local transit center. In 2019, we have identified 23 individual animals (orangutans and other wildlife including sun-bears and gibbons) held illegally, and though the numbers don't look like improvement without context, it is a definite win. It has become increasingly difficult to locate illegally-held animals, suggesting better law enforcement and that our Environmental Education and Conservation Awareness activities have helped make people aware of local laws and the consequences of breaking them.

results and motivation our village groups have for protecting their forests through sustainable community development, the government agencies have offered to support them too!

Next up is a training on how to best maintain and use the equipment, and how to target a sustainable market!



Donate



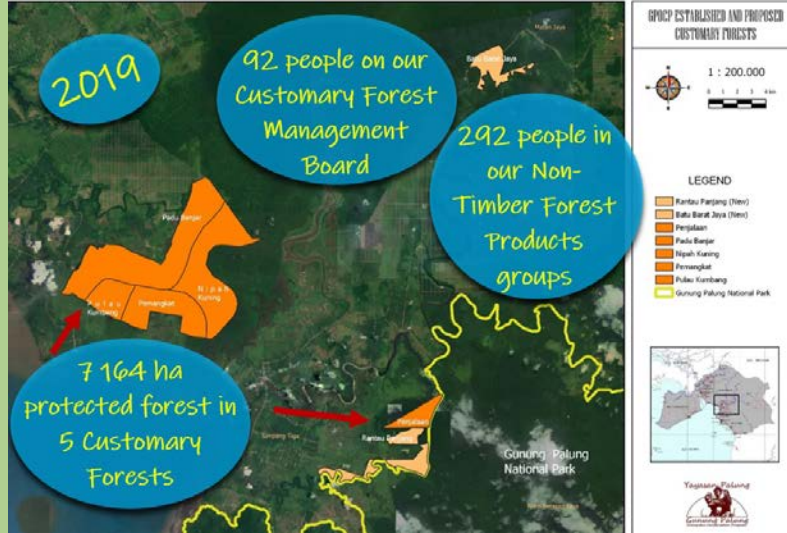
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Choose GPOCP as your Amazon Smile recipient and 0.05% of your sales will go directly to us.

Forward to a Friend

"People may doubt what you say, but they will believe what you do."

Lewis Cass



Our 5 Customary Forests (orange) as of 2019, including two new areas (light orange) where proposals have been submitted to the Ministry of Forestry.

Our Customary Forest program has also come a long way since 2009! This program works to obtain legal protection and establish a community management system for a carefully selected local forest. In 2009, we had only just submitted a proposal for the legal decree to protect 1,070 ha forest in the village of Lamon Satong. Since then, not only has the proposal been accepted, but other villages took inspiration from the model and approached GPOCP to help establish a similar strategy for their forests. Now we have 5 established Customary Forests, totaling 7,174 ha and in 2019 have submitted proposals for two additional forests consisting of another 1,179 ha. We work with 92 active members who form the Customary Forest Management Boards, and over 292 people across 22 groups produce Non-Timber Forest Products as a result of sustainable agro-forestry with their forest products. Commodities include coconut oil, coconut shell products (cups, bowls, art), *nipah* or *pandanus* bags, mats, bowls etc., fish crackers, honey and coffee.



Savings banks made from coconut shells, and organic forest coffee from our Customary Forests.

Our programs work intimately with local communities to develop lasting relationships and independent strategies for long-term success. That success can be hard to quantify - we teach one student, but that student teaches their family and friends, who teach theirs and so on. Members of the organic farming groups show others how to create a sustainable and non-environmentally destructive income for their family that also doesn't put them in danger (logging, arrest, long work hours and travel). The people are seeing the results of their own hard work and choices, guided and facilitated by GPOCP.

Most important, not a single activity would have been possible without our heroic supporters, donors and funders. Thank you all for your support and we look forward to another #10YearChallenge!

Fruitful Orangutan Seed Dispersal

By Andrea Blackburn, PhD Candidate, Department of Anthropology, Boston University

Orangutans have powerful jaws and teeth adapted for crushing hard food objects. This selection of traits would suggest orangutans are crushing and eating seeds as a main component of their diet. Based on these observations orangutans have been labelled as 'seed predators'. However, my research this year in Gunung Palung National Park tested an alternate hypothesis. I predicted that in addition to chewing up and destroying seeds, orangutans are also swallowing seeds intact and dispersing these seeds throughout the forest. Many species of primates that consume a large quantity of fruit are important seed dispersers, so I hypothesized that orangutans may similarly be dispersing viable fruit seeds.



Andrea Blackburn following an orangutan on a hillslope while collecting behavioral data.

I followed orangutans, analyzed their feeding behavior, and counted seeds defecated by orangutans for my dissertation research at Boston University. In addition to following orangutans, I also conducted germination experiments to test if seeds dispersed by orangutans would germinate better than seeds collected from fruits. Camera traps were valuable in helping me understand what other animals interact with seeds dispersed by orangutans. Sometimes rodents stash the seeds elsewhere in an act called 'caching' and sometimes other animals eat the dispersed seeds. Excitingly, I was able to do my research alongside Ahmad Rizal, an undergraduate student from Jakarta, who is also interested in understanding the ecological role of orangutans as seed dispersers.



Pregnant Walimah searching for fruit during an early morning in March.

My research showed that orangutans are frequently dispersing a wide diversity of seeds throughout the forest. I will analyze the data back at Boston University to figure out which of these genera orangutans are dispersing most effectively. Orangutan dispersed seeds do germinate and often times a higher percentage of orangutan dispersed seeds germinated compared to the seeds collected directly from fruit. It appears that the act of an orangutan consuming and defecating a seed does actually help the seed germinate. Although orangutans do predate a portion of fruit seeds, for a different group of fruits orangutans are important seed dispersers.



Andrea Blackburn with her germination experiment at Cabang Panti Research Station.

Throughout my year at Cabang Panti Research Station I made many friends and had many great experiences. The help of the Cabang Panti's research staff was invaluable to me. The field assistants assisted me with collecting behavioral data while following orangutans and the lab assistants helped with processing samples brought back from the forest. The many students, interns, volunteers, and managers were incredible to work with as well. I would not have had a successful research year without all of their help. I will miss my time and friends at Cabang Panti.

Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program (GPOCP)

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Orangutan Photographs © Tim Laman
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