

Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program



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an e-newsletter from your friends in West Kalimantan

Dear Friends and Supporters,

Join Team Wild Orangutan! We are excited to announce a new on-line community initiative to help fund the work of the Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program, including its habitat protection, conservation awareness, and research activities. Join us by committing to a monthly donation of \$5/month or more. With your help, we can make a difference for wild orangutans. By joining our Team, you will be signed up to receive our exclusive monthly posts through our Team Area on the website. Learn about the orangutans the research team is following in the wild and get behind the scenes content from the field! Find us at www.savewildorangutans.org and become a

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member. Our hope is to provide a way for people to help make a difference in saving wild orangutans. We hope you will help us spread the word to your family and friends. We look forward to sharing more of our work with you as a special member of our team!

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GPOCP Annual
Meeting

This Spring, Tim and I are doing a series of Nat Geo Live shows, talking about our 28 years of studying, photographing and conserving wild orangutans. We just got back from Edmonton, Canada and our next shows are in [Toronto](#), February 23-25 (4 shows), [Portland](#) on March 2, and [Chicago](#) on March 10. Don't miss hearing about our "Adventures Among Orangutans".

Also, on February 8th, BBC America and AMC will feature the [Seven Worlds, One Planet](#) Asia episode. One of the segments is on the wild orangutans of Gunung Palung National Park, that we helped produce. We were also thrilled to be selected for the behind-the-scenes coverage at the end of the show!

In news from the field, our head Artisan – Ibu Ida – has won the prestigious Disney Conservation Hero Award – which we celebrate in our first article, with Program Director, Victoria Gehrke, writing about Ibu Ida's accomplishments. Our second article comes from Tori Bakely, who just finished up her year at Cabang Panti Research Station and gives us an insight into jungle life and her research on wild orangutan feeding behaviors.

We also had our Annual Meeting, as highlighted in the side bar, where we worked out the final plans for the coming year. We were also excited to receive an award for Environmental Conservation from Boston Awards.

You may notice some changes in our newsletter and emails. We are transitioning into a new software program, so please let us know what you think! And thank you all again for your support – we could not do any of our important conservation work without you.

Sincerely,



Cheryl Knott, PhD
Executive Director

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

Our Disney Conservation Hero

By Victoria Gehrke, Conservation Program Director

One of GPOCP's conservation strategies is to work within the heart of local communities, inspiring behavioral change and long-term thinking for wildlife conservation success. Our capacity building model works with villagers to hone in on a craft that interests them and what they assess as beneficial. This ensures continued motivation, follow-through and ultimately a high success rate. A key to our success has been identifying and nurturing potential community leaders to help drive change in community groups and build a lasting legacy of wildlife conservation throughout the Gunung Palung landscape.

As many of you may already know, Ibu Ida (Saparida) is one of our Sustainable Livelihoods program's head artisans and lives in a small rural village in the Kayong Utara regency, in the buffer zones of Gunung Palung National Park. Ibu Ida has inspired cultural awareness, skill sharing, sustainable development and wildlife conservation through traditional craftsmanship using the *Pandanus amaryllifolius* plant. Ibu Ida learned the techniques of traditional mat weaving from her mother on her parent's farm as a child. Ibu Ida later realized that these specific skills for creating these handicrafts, as well as how to harvest and manage the forest where the *pandanus* plants grow, were being lost between the generations. Her hobby became her passion, which in turn grew into sustainable community development directly benefiting forest conservation.



2019 Boston Awards

GPOCP is honored and excited to have been nominated and won the award for Environmental Conservation by the Boston Awards.



GPOCP Hosts Annual Meeting

In January, we held our Annual Meeting at GPOCP Education Center Bentangor, just on the border of Gunung Palung National Park!

We evaluated our activities and goals over the past year and determined new strategic plans for the coming year, focusing on long-

term impacts and how to achieve our



How to achieve our conservation mission of creating a human community aware and motivated to preserving orangutans and their rainforest habitats in the Gunung Palung landscape.

Ibu Ida giving a description of how to harvest pandanus safely and in a sustainable manner.

Pandanus requires a healthy forest canopy. In order for artisans to sustainably use this natural resource, they must actively conserve their neighboring forests from deforestation. Thus, Ibu Ida saw the connection between protecting forests and creating sustainable incomes for local people and she began encouraging artisans and other communities using this plant to protect their local flora and fauna.

Ibu Ida's conservation story began back in August 2011, when Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program (GPOCP) hosted a Sustainable Livelihoods meeting in her local village to discuss the artisans' product development, networking and business management skills. Ibu Ida joined the newly formed group, where her enthusiasm and skills quickly shone through. Ibu Ida joined several training sessions and workshops, and learned how to start and maintain an active artisan community. With networking support from GPOCP, she developed a strategy to reach more buyers by connecting with private and government distributors. This connection enabled her to sell items in bulk quantities and helped her establish an economic alternative livelihood for other community members, especially locals involved in destructive livelihoods such as mining and logging. The social and economic success of this group, led by Ibu Ida and supported by GPOCP, has inspired multiple villages both locally and nationally to return to traditional craftsmanship and advocate for forest conservation through economical and sustainable livelihoods options.





Ibu Ida weaving a handbag using dried pandanus leaves.

In 2015, Ibu Ida became the spokesperson for the Kayong Utara regency artisan groups and started working with the Regency's First Lady - who is also the Chairwoman of the National Crafts Council (DEKRANASDA) for the region. Guided by GPOCP, Ibu Ida was in the forefront, creating a collaboration with DEKRANASDA and local artisans. Crafts produced by the artisans are sold to DEKRANASDA, and in turn are distributed to buyers all over the nation through shops and expositions in West Java. Ibu Ida knew that this was a huge step in the right direction, "Getting involved with DEKRANASDA has given hope to local artisans that there is a need for their products and that others [appreciate their designs] and craftsmanship." Ibu Ida was trusted by the other artisans to lead them in increasing the productivity of woven pandanus products that are sold every month now to DEKRANASDA.

In 2016, Ibu Ida took it upon herself to start visiting schools across the district – ranging from elementary to vocational high schools. Every month she would volunteer to teach traditional weaving techniques. Another highlight from 2016 is Ibu Ida's work with Ibu Vina. Previously, Ibu Vina worked laboriously in dangerous rock

vina. Previously, Ibu Vina worked laboriously in dangerous rock mines. She would harvest these stones and boulders and sell them to make ends meet for her family. With guidance from Ibu Ida, and GPOCP's community groups, Ibu Vina has quit this backbreaking work and now relies solely on the sale of her handicrafts to support her household.

In December 2017, Ibu Ida was invited by the head of three different villages to train a total of 115 community members in *pandanus* weaving as a way to improve the local economy while also conserving the forests in the Gunung Palung National Park landscape. The National Park heard of her success and invited her to two more villages to train another 55 people. Gunung Palung National Park staff have since continued their support and collaboration with Ibu Ida through community empowerment programs, and even named her their outreach counterpart. Ibu Ida was also appointed the Pioneer in Natural Resource Management after her success in leading and mobilizing communities to use wild plants for economic stability.

In 2019, GPOCP's Sustainable Livelihoods program has succeeded in our goal of creating high quality profiles at the native community level who can influence the local government towards sustainable development. Ibu Ida has, as of December 3rd, been appointed an official board member of the National Crafts Council (DEKRANASDA) of Kayong Utara. The inauguration ceremony was held in Sukadana and she was appointed directly by the Bupati (Governor) of Kayong Utara himself. With this new position for local government representative, Ibu Ida can directly influence any regulations regarding traditional crafts (NFTP products) and sustainable land-use management in Kayong Utara.

Ibu Ida continues her conservation stewardship. She has spearheaded the establishment of a new agroforestry plot where she and her group planted 50 clusters of *Pandanus*, which included 155 tree saplings including 4 MPTS (multipurpose tree species) such as Rambutan (*Nephelium lappaceum*), Durian (*Durio zibethinus*), Jengkol (*Archidendron pauciflorum*) and Petai (*Parkia speciosa*) which will provide the canopy cover needed for *pandanus* to thrive. Ibu Ida continues to motivate and inspire through her passion and success in her business, programs and collaborations, as well as support from the national governmental level. GPOCP is more than honored to collaborate with this formidable woman and grateful she has helped us as much as we have helped her reach government levels for local conservation. From grassroots (or shall we say *Pandanus* roots?) to government, working with individuals at the community level is the key to long-term conservation success.

A Year for the Jungle Books

By *Tori Bakley, GPOCP Research Assistant*

As a research assistant for GPOCP, 2019 was a full-immersion into research, conservation, and cultural exploration. I did not visit any of my family or friends during my year with the project, but I did spend every day with incredible new friends in an incredible new place that quickly felt like home. Even though my primary activity was either data or sample collection and processing, I also became well-versed in speaking Bahasa Indonesian, identifying individual orangutans by facial features and baking marvelous desserts in a camp oven.



Tori next to the still roots of a Palaquium tree that was visited by orangutans three days in a row!

While I did work on all aspects of the project, I was focused on orangutan mother and offspring feeding interactions. Luckily for me, most of the orangutans we encountered were active mothers. We had several new babies born this year and saw some of the younger orangutans achieve big milestones, such as travelling alone or making their own nests. Having a baby or practicing nest building are remarkable developments in an orangutan's life, but possibly more notable is how they accomplish them in the first place. In a habitat that does not provide much sustenance at surface level, orangutans have adapted to make the most out of it.

The solitary lifestyle of wild orangutans leads to infrequent mating events. Seemingly rarer is the birth of a baby orangutan. It takes over a decade for a female to reach maturity, and once she has a baby, that baby could nurse from her for around eight years. That means the mother's diet must provide energy for herself and her nursing offspring, which could be challenging when high calorie foods, such as fruits, are scarce and irregularly available. Therefore, fallback foods, primarily bark and leaves, become a crucial source of energy and nutrients.





*Walimah snacking on leaves while Winnie plays around. Photo by
Tori Bakley.*

So, we ask, do immature orangutans have the same digestive abilities as their mothers? How do they compare? If an offspring does not have the digestive system to process difficult foods until it is older, then having mom's milk on the menu would be a literal lifesaver – providing food security and reducing the chances of nutrient-deficiencies during important years of development. Fecal samples can be examined to see how well food is processed, how much energy was absorbed and how much nursing takes place when samples are collected from mother-offspring dyads on the same day. Urine analyses can reveal how the mother's body is using energy, and if, for example, it is under stress in a fruitless forest.

I was most surprised by finding that wild, young infant defecations are near-impossible to collect. Infants are simply less-predictable and create tiny, harder to find samples than their moms. With a mostly milk diet at first, they defecate infrequently. Thus, we have yet to collect a fecal sample from Winnie, the newest addition to Cabang Panti. As for older offspring, we were able to successfully collect samples that will be processed in university laboratories in the future. They will provide vital insight into the digestive abilities of immature orangutans.

While this project did not begin or end with me, I have thoroughly enjoyed studying these concepts and seeing these behaviors first-hand. Every time Walimah shredded a piece of bark from a trunk the way we might pull apart a cheese stick, I was amazed at the strength in her teeth, the knowledge in her mind, and the ecological history that brought it all together for her baby and I to learn from in unison. I will miss every aspect of this project, but I am excited to apply all that I have learned from this experience to

those in the future. I am endlessly grateful to everyone who was a part of the Cabang Panti family this year, as, even if just for a moment, we shared an experience like no other.



Tori and other Cabang Panti women swimming at one of the park's largest waterfalls. (From left: Ziva and Maidina of OFP, Tori, BOCS student Ulda, and camp cook Ju).

Success is not final. Failure is not fatal. It's the courage to continue that counts.

Winston Churchill



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