

Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program

Code RED

an e-newsletter from your friends in West Kalimantan

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Issue 96

Dear Friends and Supporters,

As we finish out this whirlwind of a year, and enter a new one, I am filled with joy and pride from the many successes of 2020. I want to especially acknowledge all of our hard working staff who stepped into new roles this year and kept our programs going, achieving many major milestones despite the pandemic. We reflect on some of these accomplishments in our first article, sharing the highlights from both our research and conservation programs.

Our second article celebrates the fabulous National Park renovations of the Cabang Panti Research Station. This achievement was celebrated earlier this month at an inaugural ceremony. We explain the history of the station and the remodeling project, and share some beautiful photos of the new buildings.

Thank you to our many supporters from around the world who are helping us to continue the fight to save wild orangutans. We also invite you to start 2021 by becoming a member of the Save Wild Orangutans team. For as little as \$5/month you can become a member and receive periodic special updates throughout the year. Check out how to join, and access some of this additional content at our [website](#).

I wish you all a happy and healthy New Year. I'm excited to see what 2021 holds.

Sincerely,



Cheryl Knott, PhD
Executive Director

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

The Year in Review

By Natalie Robinson, Program Coordinator and Cheryl Knott, Executive Director

Although 2020 has been an unprecedented year in many ways, we've been fortunate to keep busy at GPOCP, and have made great strides towards the conservation of wild orangutans. To kick off the year, we held our annual meeting in January. Our conservation and research staff came together for a three-day meeting to share the accomplishments of the last year and discuss our goals for the coming year. Later that month, Sustainable Livelihoods Head Artisan, Ibu Ida, won a [Disney Conservation Hero Award](#). We celebrated her [years of hard work](#) and her dedication to sharing her skill of weaving throughout the community and training the next generation of craftspeople.

In February, we finished a [year-long field project](#) to assess the size of the orangutan population in Gunung Palung National Park using a new methodology of matched ground and drone nest count surveys. Then, we began the next step of this study, with the analysis of [drone imagery](#), collecting data on the presence of orangutan nests. We also launched our online membership program, [Save Wild Orangutans](#), and the GP orangutans were featured in [BBC's Seven Worlds One Planet - Asia](#) episode. Dr. Cheryl Knott's work was also highlighted by [Boston University](#).



A baby orangutan named Bayas was featured in the BBC Seven Worlds One Planet episode. Bayas, along with his mother, Bibi, were among the most frequently studied orangutans in Gunung Palung this year. Photo © Tim Laman.

COVID-19 then became a worldwide pandemic. As a result, in mid-March, [GPOCP went virtual](#) and we all learned to do our part to socially distance and [#ActLikeAnOrangutan](#). Our Sustainable Livelihoods artisan groups joined forces to [sew cloth masks](#) at the onset of the pandemic. In total, they made over 6,000 masks to distribute throughout local villages. This generated a significant amount of income for the artisans, while also helping the community.

In April, we celebrated Earth Day as we were adjusting to this 'new normal', implementing new virtual ideas, and hosting a [remote craft competition](#). The next month, we officially awarded six new [West Bornean Orangutan Caring Scholarships](#). These hard-working students have now completed their first semester of university classes!



The six new university scholarship recipients (in khaki shirts) alongside GPOCP staff members after their official WBOCS acceptance ceremony.

In June we celebrated [World Rainforest Day](#) and Executive Director, Cheryl Knott, spoke as a panelist during a virtual webinar. In July, we commenced a series of [biodiversity surveys throughout each of our Customary Forests](#). These surveys aim to identify animal and plant species in forests that buffer the Park, while also training villagers on survey methods so that they can independently run such surveys in the future.

The next month, two new Customary Forests, in Batu Barat and Rantau Panjang villages, were [officially recognized](#) by the Ministry of Environment and Forestry. After a long, arduous process, the villages' Management Boards are now permitted to supervise and utilize the Customary Forests for the next 35 years! We also celebrated World Orangutan Day with a [poster design competition](#).



GPOCP field surveyors and members of the Customary Forest Management Boards enter the forest edge on their way to conduct biodiversity surveys.

In September, the first [environmental education and mobile health clinic](#) event was held in Pengkalan Teluk Village, in collaboration with another local NGO, Alam Sehat Lestari (ASRI). Our team also wrapped up a survey at our [Bentangor Environmental Education Center](#), assessing tree types and carbon content within the surrounding area. Schools in the Kayong Utara Regency opened back up in October, allowing some limited Environmental Education programming to resume.



Children from Pengkalan Teluk Village draw as part of a lesson on plant biodiversity during one of our environmental education and health clinic expeditions. We provide education in remote villages surrounding the Park in order to increase knowledge, respect and understanding about orangutans and rainforest habitat. Participants also receive free health screenings from our partners at ASRI.

In November, we resumed a survey from 2019, collecting data on Human-Orangutan Interactions (HOI) throughout 14 villages that border the National Park. We also celebrated [Orangutan Caring Week](#), with events organized by our WBOCS recipients and volunteer youth group members. In the US, Boston University recent PhDs, graduate students and undergraduates virtually participated in the Northeastern Evolutionary Primatologists (NEEP) annual meeting, presenting on their [orangutan research](#).

We've had an exciting end to the year, receiving many generous donations on Giving Tuesday. Long-time National Park counterpart, Endro Setiawan, began his [Master's thesis research](#) in the partially degraded forest near the Rangkong River, outside of our main research area. Most recently, construction of the new Cabang Panti Research Station finished, and these buildings are now officially in use! The Gunung Palung National Park Bureau (BTN-GP) hosted an inaugural ceremony to celebrate the new camp alongside many of our long-term supporters, colleagues and collaborators (see the following article).

In total, our research team spent over 1900 hours [following orangutans](#), collecting focal behavioral data on 35 different individuals. Researchers recorded observations of 13 orangutans that had not previously been studied in the Cabang Panti research vicinity. The field team also collected fecal and urine [samples](#) to study orangutan health and physiology. More than 350 new feeding trees were tagged, and we continued the long-term monitoring of two different phenological datasets throughout the research area.



Field Research Assistant, Sabta, follows a flanged male orangutan named Logan.

The staff at Cabang Panti Research Station and the Yayasan Palung office have continued to persevere, step into new roles, and take on new challenges, despite the still ongoing pandemic. We are grateful for everyone's hard work and are optimistic that the next year will bring even more successes!



This large flanged male orangutan was first found in January of this year. He had not been previously observed by researchers, and was eventually given the name Lusa.

Inauguration of the New Cabang Panti Research Station

By Edi Rahman, Field Director, Petrus Kanisius, Communications Officer, and Cheryl Knott, Executive Director

The Cabang Panti Research Station, in Gunung Palung National Park, is home to our long-term orangutan research project. Recognized by the United Nations Great Ape Survival Project as a conservation priority area, GPNP and the surrounding forests are one of the most important blocks of orangutan habitat and one of the only remaining tracts of lowland Dipterocarp rainforest in Borneo. The area has a very high biodiversity conservation value, providing critical habitat for many endangered species, including orangutans, proboscis monkeys, gibbons, hornbills and sun bears. It also provides clean water to surrounding regions and is a buffer against climate change, with deep peat forest acting as a carbon sink and mitigating flooding and damage to coast farmlands from tidal salinity. The Park's proximity to the Java Sea and its small, isolated mountain range, creates 8 distinct ecological zones. This biodiversity of animals and plants has attracted both national and international researchers to conduct studies in the GPNP area.



The newly rebuilt Main Camp which houses the laboratory, specimen room and research library.

The Cabang Panti Research Station is located in the west-central area of the Park. In 1984, Dr. Mark Leighton founded the station in collaboration with Dr. Dedy Daernedi of the Indonesian Institute of Sciences. Dr. Leighton's research at Cabang Panti continued until 1996. The Gunung Palung Orangutan Project was founded by Dr. Cheryl Knott in 1994, and a second long-term study, the One Forest Project, was established by Dr. Andrew Marshall in 2000. In the early 2000s, GPNP experienced substantial illegal logging, and the station was forced to shut down in 2003, leading to building deterioration. The station was then rebuilt in 2007, with design spearheaded by Dr. Marshall, and funded jointly by Dr. Marshall and Dr. Knott. This rebuilding of 2020 ushers in a new era, with improved and expanded research and living spaces that will provide more opportunities to current and future generations of Indonesian and foreign students and scientists.

Since the station is located deep in the primary rainforest, over 12 kilometers from the nearest village, buildings can quickly deteriorate, due to wood rot, termites, fallen trees and flooding. Thus, after more than a decade since the last major rebuilding, many of the camp structures were in need of some reconstruction. In 2019, GPNP Research Station Head, Endro Setiawan, with support from GPOCP Research Director, Wahyu Susanto, submitted a competitive proposal to the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry to have the station rebuilt. Excitingly, their proposal succeeded, and it was decided that Cabang Panti would become the new model research station for all of Indonesia!



One of 6 new researcher houses which sit along the Air Putih River and AP trail. Each stilted house has an elevated sleeping area, with a private toilet and bathing room downstairs.

All of the construction was funded by the Indonesian Ministry of Environment and Forestry, via a project through the Financial Ministry of Indonesia, with a budget of 8 billion rupiah (570,500 USD). The building was just finished last month and the inauguration ceremony was held on December 12. We welcomed special guests Bapak Citra Duani, Bupati (Regent) of the Kayong Utara Regency, and Bapak Sapto Aji Probowo, Sub-Directorate of the Director General of the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, as well as the Deputy Chief of Police and the Liaison Officer of Kayong Utara Regency, and the Head of the Sejahtera Village. Also in attendance were Yayasan Palung staff, National Park officers, long-term research counterparts from Universitas Nasional in Jakarta, and members of long-term collaborating institutions, Alam Sehat Lestari and International Animal Rescue.

The inauguration ceremony was marked by the cutting of a ribbon and the signing of a plaque at the front of the main station building. This was done by the Regent of Kayong Utara, who was serving as a representative of the Director General of the Ministry of Environment and Forestry.



Bapak Citra Buani cuts a ribbon and signs the plaque, officially opening the new Cabang Panti Research Station. Special guest, Dr. Tatang Mitra Setia, Dean of the Faculty of Biology at the National University (UNAS), and our research sponsor, looks on in the bottom photo, standing on the left.

The new station now has several buildings to support research, including a meeting hall, library, specimen room, laboratory, presentation room, lodging houses, and a place of worship. In a statement at the ceremony, Bapak Sapto declared that Cabang Panti is a model station, not only because of its good physical condition, but because of the potential for research. GPNP Head, Bapak Matheas Ari Wibawanto, went on to explain that Cabang Panti is a storehouse of knowledge that we must explore and share with the world to better our education and health. He also stated that the existence of Cabang Panti has had a positive economic impact on the surrounding community, as many members of local villages have been employed by the long-term research projects.



The new Camp Litho (left) which houses National Park Staff and a large meeting room, and Camp Nyamuk (right) which has research assistant lodging as well as a kitchen, dining area, and prayer room.

Later in the evening, a special *tumpeng* event was held, where guests shared a ceremonial Indonesian rice dish. The day ended with a series of presentations and the giving of awards. GPOCP Field Director, Edi Rahman, accepted an award from the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, officially recognizing GPOCP's conservation and research activities, which have taken place in the GPNP area since 1999, and our strong partnership with the National Park Office. We are so grateful that the Indonesian government has sponsored this construction, and are excited that this new infrastructure will better support our research project. We are hopeful that in the coming year, when COVID-19 conditions improve and travel is safe, that we can welcome more researchers from around the world and share this beautiful research station!



GPOCP Research Director, Wahyu Susanto, gives a presentation on the history of the research station during the tumpeng event.

"And now we welcome the new year, full of things that have never been"

- Rainer Maria Rilke



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