



Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program

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an e-newsletter from your friends in West Kalimantan

Dear Friends and Supporters,

I hope you have all had a happy and healthy month of February! I'm excited to announce that we have published a [new paper](#) highlighting our long-term research and conservation work in Gunung Palung. This is part of a special issue in the journal *Biological Conservation* on the importance of long-term research on conservation and ecology in the tropics! This article is a culmination of many years of work by both my research and conservation teams, and I'm thrilled to be able to share this with you all. Check out the sidebar to read *The Gunung Palung Orangutan Project: Twenty-five years at the intersection of research and conservation in a critical landscape in Indonesia*. It is thanks to the support from readers like you that this important work has been able to continue for more than 25 years.

Our first article this month comes from Dwi Yandhi Febriyanti, who started a position at GPOCP in December as our new [Environmental Education Manager](#). Yandhi comes from a scientific background, having led research and conservation projects throughout Sulawesi and Sumatra, Indonesia. We are so excited to now have her be part of our team. Here, Yandhi shares about the first environmental education expedition she led this past month, where she visited two remote villages that border the National Park.

The second article was written by student researcher, Muhamad Alfikri. Fikri comes from Universitas Nasional (UNAS) in Jakarta, and is currently conducting a 6-month research project at Gunung Palung on the fruiting and flowering patterns of rainforest trees. Here, he writes about his research thus far, which is taking place in the degraded forest area known as the *Rangkong*.

I wish you all a happy March!

Sincerely,



Cheryl Knott, PhD
Executive Director

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

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IN OTHER NEWS



New publication out now!

Dr. Cheryl Knott, with many GPOCP researchers and staff - past and present - author this insightful article.

Use [this link](#) to access the article for free.

My First Environmental Education Expedition with GPOCP

By Dwi Yandhi Febriyanti, Environmental Education Manager

The blue sky overshadowed the roar of our car as we drove towards the Nanga Tayap District. The next three days, February 9th-11th, would be my first experience as the GPOCP Environmental Education Manager carrying out an expedition to the remote regions of the Ketapang Regency. On this trip, I was joined by three of my environmental education teammates, Haning Pertiwi, Simon Tampubolon, and Petrus Kanisius.

Expeditions are routinely carried out by the GPCOP Environmental Education Team, but during the COVID-19 pandemic, this activity has been a bit difficult to implement because for many months there were no in-person activities at schools. We usually call this expedition the “KesLing” Expedition (*Kesehatan Lingkungan*, or Environmental Health). This activity is carried out in collaboration with another local NGO, *Alam Sehat Lestari* (ASRI), who host a mobile health clinic while we hold education and outreach programming. The objective of this KesLing expedition was to visit two villages, namely Pangkalan Telok Village (specifically the Jihing area) and Mesubang Village (in the Bayangan area). These two villages are directly adjacent to Gunung Palung National Park.



Children gather in Pangkalan Telok Village for an educational film screening.

The journey to get to these remote areas takes 6 hours, with one break for lunch – a long time to travel to a village within the same district! During the trip I enjoyed much of the scenery, though the beautiful forest views were disrupted by the vast palm oil plantations that we had to pass to get to the two villages. I remember that we had to go through the oil palm plantations for almost two hours. Imagine if we calculated how much palm oil is produced from those plantations!



Children pose with their copies of our Indonesian language newsletter, MlaS.

Once we arrived that afternoon, we began installing screens and projectors in preparation for our educational film screening that evening. The educational film screenings, which took place in the yard in front of the village mosque, ran smoothly, and attracted quite a large audience. The goal of the film screening is to be a medium for public awareness, so that participants can gain a greater appreciation for the environment. We carried out the screening of the film for two nights during our stay in Jihing.

Our first school activity, on the second day of the expedition, was to visit Nanga Tayap Primary School. We had the opportunity to teach about forest benefits and functions. This material was delivered to students in grades 4-6 at the school. The students learned about forests, and their benefits and functions for humans and the maintenance of healthy ecosystems, as well as the consequences that happen if forests disappear. Activities continued through the afternoon, when students took trips around the village, learning about the biodiversity in their own backyards. They learned that many of the plants that surround them are beneficial for everyday life. The activity ended with each child sharing about the plants or animals they saw, and explaining how they benefit humans and why they are important.



The author, Yandhi, lectures in front of a classroom of students.

The last activity of this KesLing Expedition was to visit another primary school Nanga Tayap, as well as Satap Nanga Tayap Junior High School, both of which are in Bayangan, Mesubang Village. This time we were divided into two teams – Haning and I were in the primary school, while Simon and Petrus were in the junior high school. The Forest Benefits and Functions lesson was delivered again to the students in grades 4-6. We discussed the plants around the school yard which are beneficial for life. Meanwhile, at the junior high school, students learned about climate change and its impact on living things. This lecture was attended by students in grades 7-8.

Throughout my first expedition, I was so happy to see the excitement from students and their curiosity about the material they were learning. After three days, we made the long journey back to our office in Ketapang. I am already looking forward to the next time I am able to lead an expedition!

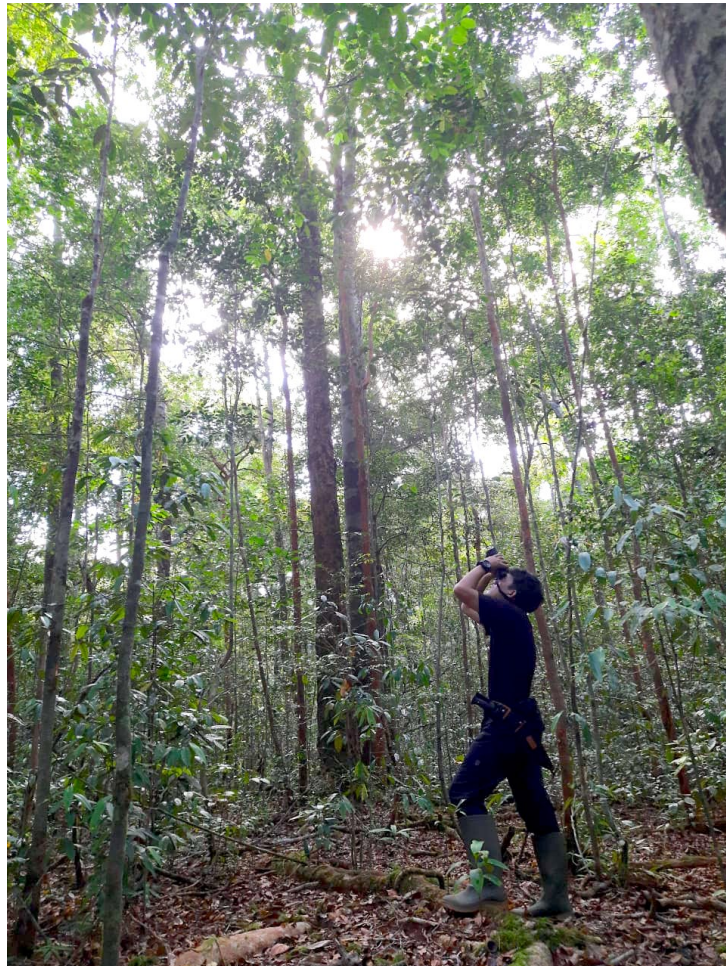
My Time in the Kalimantan Forest

By Muhamad Alfikri, Student Researcher

How do you imagine the Bornean tropical rainforest? Towering trees? Diverse animals? Orangutans swinging from tree to tree? Unpredictable rain? Or peat soil with red water? All these are things I have encountered at the Cabang Panti Research Station, in Gunung Palung National Park, West Kalimantan (Borneo).

Hello, my name is Muhamad Alfikri. I am a student in the Faculty of Biology from the National University (UNAS) in South Jakarta. Through this article I will share my experiences during my research in the Kalimantan forest.

My journey to reach the land of Kalimantan began with an offer from my professor, Ibu Sri Suci Utami Atmoko. People who work in research and conservation know her as an expert orangutan researcher. I am also working with Pak Endro Setiawan, who works in Gunung Palung National Park and is a Master's degree student at UNAS. Pak Endro, or Mas Endro as I usually call him, is conducting research on the diversity of plant species in Gunung Palung. In addition to helping him do his research, I am now carrying out my own research on orangutan habitat vegetation, to see habitat conditions and also the availability of food trees for orangutans.



The author, Fikri, observes an orangutan in the forest.

My work takes place in a forest area around the *Sungai Rangkong* (Rangkong River). We call this general area the Rangkong for short. The Rangkong is a separate area from the main Research Station study area, because it is a degraded forest, closer to the edge of the National Park. While at the Rangkong, I have been accompanied by a team of 7 people, namely Pak Herman, Pak Lande, Pak Bacong, Bang Andre, Rani, Noko, and Mas Endro. During the first week of activities at the Rangkong, we set up camp on the riverbank. The trip from our camp to the location where we collect data is sometimes as far as 2 km away, through swamps and across rivers. Unpredictable rain became our challenge while working, because heavy rains made the river's height increase and the swampy land became flooded. One thing that I find the most fun about staying in the forest is that we always come together to socialize and eat our meals at the end of the day. Without cellphone signal or other luxuries that I'm used to in the city, I get even more pleasure from the simple things.

You may be wondering how do you see whether a forest area is in good condition or not? One way is to observe the various types of plants that live and grow in the forest. During the first week in the Rangkong, I learned to collect phenological data on the plants present within tree plots. Each plot is 200m². Each tree had already been identified, but we continued by measuring the diameter at breast height (DBH) of each stem, the total number of plant species within one plot, and the presence and condition of any fruit growing on trees. We did this in the three different habitat types within the Rangkong, which are peat swamp, kerangas (heath), and alluvial forest.



The view from the ground, looking up at the tree canopy, in Gunung Palung National Park.

After one week of activities at the Rangkong, I went to the Cabang Panti Research Station, about a 1.5-hour walk further into the forest. The first time I arrived, I was quite amazed by the condition of the research camp. The building conditions at the camp are very nice. There is even a lab to carry out research activities. The workers, assistants, and officers from the National Park are all very friendly. Jokes can be heard every night and also everyone who lives there always gathers during dinner time, making a warm nighttime atmosphere.

While at Cabang Panti I learned to search for orangutans. Normally, each field assistant searches in the forest from 8am to 3pm. If an assistant finds an orangutan, he will follow the orangutan until nighttime, when it finishes building a nest to sleep in. The next day, three assistants will wake up at 3am and go to the location of the nest where the orangutan is sleeping, arriving before the orangutan wakes up. Assistants follow the orangutan for the whole day, while collecting data on all the activities that the orangutan does, and collecting samples of food, feces, and urine. This continues for the next 5 days and when the last day arrives, the orangutan will stop being followed.

What I enjoy most when participating in orangutan follow activities is observing their behavior. Do you know what orangutans do when it rains a lot? In the past, I could only watch from behind a television screen to see orangutans turning tree branches into umbrellas, protecting them from rainwater. I will never forget my experience of seeing orangutans doing this right before my eyes!



A young orangutan named King. The author joined along to follow King and his mother, Kabar, at Cabang Panti.

Another thing that is exciting is seeing female orangutans with their offspring. The baby orangutans are very cute, and almost look like human babies. It makes me sad to think that hunters kill these beautiful creatures, or unethically take babies away from their mothers.

I have also learned a lot about the names of plant species. To identify a plant, we can look at its physical characteristics, such as leaf shape, leaf location, flower shape, stem color, and the smell of the plant's sap. There are many types of plants that can be found in Gunung Palung National Park. I have also learned that each habitat (there are 8 habitat types in Gunung Palung) has its own types of plants that are rarely found in other habitats.

There are so many other things that I have experienced here that I can't begin to describe them all. I still have a long time left and I look forward to conducting the rest of my research. I hope that my story has given you a sense of the amazing experiences that I have had living in the rainforest of Gunung Palung National Park.



Some more finds that Fikri photographed in the forest – a snail (left) and mushroom (right).

"The more clearly we can focus our attention on the wonders and realities of the universe about us, the less taste we shall have for destruction."

- Rachel Carson



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