

# Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program

YAYASAN PALUNG

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**Code RED**

*an e-newsletter from your friends in West Kalimantan*

Dear Friends and Supporters,

Today is Giving Tuesday! Last week I felt such gratitude during the Thanksgiving holiday for our endlessly dedicated team in Indonesia, and all of *you*, our supporters. Giving Tuesday, which follows the more-famous Black Friday and Cyber Monday, began in 2012 as a global generosity movement to unleash the power of radical generosity to transform communities and the world. This year, I encourage you all to consider making a tax-deductible donation to our organization, to help the fight to [#SaveWildOrangutans](#). On the sidebar, learn more about other ways to support us by purchasing an orangutan print as part of Tim Laman's [Holiday Fundraiser Sale](#), joining our [monthly membership team](#), or gifting some [GPOCP apparel](#) to friends and family (or yourself!).

Our first article comes from Petrus Kanisius (Pit), who reports on the past month's activities for Orangutan Caring Week. Be sure to check out the photos of all our committed staff, youth volunteers and students who continue to plan creative and engaging activities to spread conservation awareness among the local community.

The second article was written by Herman, a Orangutan Field Assistant at Cabang Panti Research Station. Herman has many ties to our project – his eldest son, Sahril, has been a GPOP Field Research Assistant since 2015, and his middle son, Agus, has volunteered with the RK-REBONK youth group for many years. Herman's family home is one of the last along the main road in Tanjung Gunung Village, close to the forest entry point, and has served as a meeting point and logistics nexus for our project for the past 5+ years. Herman and his family's support have been invaluable to our project. In this article, he bravely shares his story. With a past in illegal logging, he recounts his journey to finding work at Cabang Panti, and shares an inspiring message about learning to love the forest and caring for its conservation. Herman is now an invaluable member of our team.

I wish you all a safe and happy December.

Sincerely,



Cheryl Knott, PhD  
Executive Director

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

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**SUPPORT US THIS GIVING TUESDAY**

**DONATE**

**Join Save Wild Orangutans Today**



For each orangutan print sold, photographer Tim Laman will donate 50% of proceeds to our cause. Get yours [here](#) while the sale lasts.



Purchase an organic GPOCP tshirt, sweatshirt or tote bag through our [TeeMill site](#). All proceeds are donated to our cause.

**amazon**smile

Do your shopping through [AmazonSmile](#) and select GPOCP as your charity. A portion of each purchase gets donated to our cause.

## Celebrating Orangutan Caring Week 2021

By Petrus Kanisius, Communications Officer

Orangutan Caring Week (OCW) is held every year in November to raise awareness about the critically endangered orangutan. Each year, GPOCP/Yayasan Palung celebrates this week-long event. This year it was held from November 7<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup>. Specifically, this year's theme was "Respecting nature to save orangutans, biodiversity & our collective future."



RK-REBONK volunteers and WBOCS students take a group photo after planting trees in celebration of Orangutan Caring Week.

Each year at Yayasan Palung we host a series of activities to celebrate Orangutan Caring Week, and involve youth volunteers from the RK-TAJAM and REBONK groups, the West Bornean Orangutan Caring Scholarship (WBOCS) students, as well as children and teens from a variety of local schools. This year, our team visited SMP Negeri 9 Ketapang



junior high school to carry out a series of activities. Students learned about the benefits of orangutans and forests. They also learned to identify different types of plants that grow around their school. Unfortunately, though we planned to take a field trip to the urban forest of Ketapang, we had to cancel due to heavy rainfall that day.

The conservation youth group volunteers from RK-TAJAM and REBONK played an active role in celebrating OCW. On November 13<sup>th</sup>, TAJAM members performed a puppet show, created screen prints and distributed free reusable tote bags in Ketapang. From the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> in Kayong Utara Regency, REBONK members and WBOCS students commemorated OCW with SMK Negeri 1 Simpang Hillir high school students involved in the school's Student Nature Lovers club. This included screening a series of environmental films at our Bentangor Environmental Education Center. The group also planted *jengkol* tree seedlings in Bukit Mendale, Sejahtera Village in Sukadana.



*Youth group volunteers pose with their orangutan puppets and a young community participant during OCW.*

Additionally, on November 9<sup>th</sup>, the Bentangor Kids Club met at Bentangor to celebrate OCW. The group of 43 children learned the *Si Pongo* song, watched a film about orangutans, and competed in a quiz about orangutans and the rainforest. The children were all very enthusiastic about participating in the activities and got quite competitive during the quiz session, wanting to win the prizes!



WBOCS students that live in the city of Pontianak where they attend university also participated in Orangutan Caring Week. Students participated in the planting of 300 tree seedlings in the peat forest of Peniti Dalam 1 village, Segedong District, Mempawah Regency. Muhammad Syainullah (WBOCS 2020) and Gusti Irawan (WBOCS 2019) also spoke on Pontianak's *Radio Kharisma* show, focusing on the theme "Conservation of Natural Resources and Orangutans from a Legal and Environmental Perspective." Other students held a lecture at a school in Siantan Hulu, Pontianak.



*WBOCS students and REBONK volunteers install a signpost for Orangutan Caring Week 2021. It reads "Plant one tree, grow one life."*

Also, an online webinar/lecture was held on November 12<sup>th</sup>. Speakers on the webinar included Siti Roqayah from the Gunung Palung National Park office, Ahmad Rizal from the GPOPC/YP research team, and Rahn Siti Aqila from RK-TAJAM. The moderator of the event was Muhammad Syainullah, a current WBOCS student. This webinar was an opportunity to commemorate OCW and invite the next generation of conservationists to learn more and participate in respecting nature for the future of biodiversity.

All in all, the series of activities for Orangutan Caring Week 2021 were a success. It's thanks to the volunteers, community and local schools that we can continue to run this important programming.

## From an Illegal Logger to a Forest Advocate

*By Herman, Orangutan Field Assistant*

Hello, my name is Herman. I am a Field Assistant for the Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program/Yayasan Palung. I come from the village of Tanjung Gunung, which is directly adjacent to Gunung Palung National Park, in the Kayong Utara Regency. When I talk about my past work, before I joined the project, I actually feel a little embarrassed. But I think that telling my story can be helpful for others. I worked in the illegal logging world since I was very young, before I got married. I think it was 1996 when I first began working to transport cut wood along a river, out of the forest. At that time, many people made logging their permanent job, including me. When I first started my job was to work transporting cut logs downriver, I was very far from the actual forest area or National Park.





*Herman takes a GPS coordinate after tagging an orangutan feeding tree in Gunung Palung National Park.*

By 1997, there was illegal logging work in the forest of Tanjung Gunung village, where I lived, directly adjacent to the forest entrance of Gunung Palung National Park (GPNP). I then began work as a "wood pusher", to transport wood from the forest where it was cut to the nearest river, along with some of my friends. I earned a lot of money from logging, because there was a high demand for wood at that time. Then, due to the small size of the location and the high demand for wood, we slowly began to enter GPNP to look for more trees to cut.

By 2004, we worked completely within the GPNP area. When we worked within the National Park boundaries, we were very careful because we knew that there were foreign researchers and forestry officers in and around the Cabang Panti Research Station. I became very uncomfortable working like this because I was afraid of getting caught and going to jail, but there was nowhere else I could work where I would earn as much money as I was getting from logging. In 2007, I switched from working as a wood pusher and became a lumberjack, to actually hold the chainsaw to cut down the trees.

Throughout those years, I must have cut down hundreds of trees in GPNP. I didn't know whether the trees were protected or not. What mattered to me was that they could be sold. On several occasions I had to run and hide from the GPNP forestry officers. I was almost caught a few times. The working conditions were so tough and I felt so uncomfortable. I always thought about quitting, but I didn't know what else to do to support my family.

In 2009, I ventured to visit one of the forestry officers in GPNP named Endro Setiawan. I had lots of discussions with Endro and I would ask what kind of solutions there were for me to stop working as a logger. I hadn't known at first that Endro was a forestry officer who was also a friend/colleague of the foreigners that worked in GPNP. Soon, Endro and the foreigners invited me to help with their work. I began by helping to clear forest transects around the research station. I also worked to help clean the river so that supplies for the camp could be transported up by canoe. After I helped with this work on several different occasions, I had learned a lot from the forest officers and the foreign researchers. I also learned why these foreigners were living inside the forest – so that they could do research on orangutans and their habitat.

Although I continued to work on various projects around Cabang Panti, the work was never permanent, and only as needed. I wasn't able to stop logging completely, and I even worked as an illegal miner for some time. Around 2014, there was a major operation by forestry officers, police, and the Indonesian national army to enter GPNP and look for illegal loggers. Several people were arrested and taken to the police station. After that, I decided I could no longer work as a logger.



*Herman the “eagle eye” (front) tags a nest tree during our orangutan population survey in 2019. Behind him is Beth Barrow, Conservation Research Director, and Sabta, Field Research Assistant.*

After the majority of the illegal logging activities stopped in the GPNP area, the researchers began entering Cabang Panti by foot, from our village. Previously, people always went up to the camp by boat, entering the river from another area. I really began to love the forest starting in 2018, when I began working as the head porter in Tanjung Gunung. We helped both foreign and Indonesian researchers to bring their belongings from my village to Cabang Panti. This job brought me closer to both forestry officers and researchers at Cabang Panti. I got to know “Ibu” Cheryl Knott, the head of the orangutan project, “Pak” Tim Laman, who works as a wildlife photographer, and “Pak” Andy Marshall, who led the One Forest Project. I continued to learn about the importance of the forest, and learned to care about its protection. I thought, if foreign people come all the way to my home in Indonesia to research forests, orangutans and other wildlife, why would I want to destroy them? During my time as the head porter, I was also asked to help the project during orangutan nest surveys.

Then, at the beginning of 2020, the project offered me a permanent job! I was tasked with working to clear transects, clean the river, search for orangutans, assist with sample collection, and help upkeep the campsite. I was so happy to learn more about orangutan research, and be able to play a direct role in maintaining forest conservation. Now, my friends at Cabang Panti call me “*mata elang*” (eagle eye) because I was very good at surveying nests, and now am very good at finding orangutans in the forest to follow. I am very grateful to Ibu Cheryl and everyone at Cabang Panti, and the GPNP forestry officers for giving me the opportunity to work my way up to this job.

Now, I look back at my past and know that I could never work in illegal logging again. Really, I stopped and realized I needed to take care of the forest, not just because my job had changed, but because I knew in my heart and learned from all the experiences I’ve had, that I needed to make a change. I encourage you all to take care of the forest! Take care of the future of the earth!

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Management of Cabang Panti Research Station is conducted by the Gunung Palung National Park Office (BTN-GP) in collaboration with GPOCP/YP. Scientific research is carried out in conjunction with the Universitas Nasional (UNAS) and Boston University.



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