



Dear Friends and Supporters,

As we wrap up this short month, we have two exciting articles to share with you all.

Our first article, written by Communications Officer Petrus Kanisius, is about the newest members of the REBONK Youth Volunteer Group and the inauguration event held for them this past month. Since 2010, the members of our two youth groups have been pivotal to our Environmental Education and Conservation Awareness program. While strengthening their commitment to and concern for orangutans and their habitat, these young conservationists help to develop and carry out many of our public outreach events. Their creative delivery of conservation content has helped to spread our message across a wide demographic of people. I'm excited to welcome them as part of the GPOCP/Yayasan Palung family!

Our second article was written by Research Manager Ahmad Rizal and Research Director Wahyu Susanto. Rizal and Wahyu share exciting updates about the new camp that we've built in the degraded forest area, referred to as the Rangkong. As orangutan habitat throughout their range becomes increasingly degraded, it is important to understand how these changes impact their behavior, health, diet, and physiology. The proximity of the Rangkong area of degraded habitat to the main camp of primary rainforest allows us to see how the same population of orangutans copes with these different environmental circumstances. We've been slowly expanding our project to this area, located between our main research site and the edge of the National Park, since 2019. The construction of this camp, which has been a goal for many years, will now provide a more comfortable and safe space for local and foreign researchers. Read on to see some photos of the newly constructed campsite.

I wish you all a happy and healthy March!

Sincerely,

Cheryl Knott, PhD
Executive Director

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

The Inauguration of the 11th Cohort of REBONK Youth Group Volunteers

By Petrus Kanisius, Communications Officer

One of our strategies for supporting conservation of orangutans and their habitat is to instill knowledge and enthusiasm among the community, especially the younger generation. GPOCP/Yayasan Palung's Environmental Education program regularly works to visit schools for lectures and puppet shows, host field trips, and carry out programming for youth group volunteers.

Our two youth groups first started in 2010. One group, based in the Ketapang Regency, is named RK-TAJAM (an abbreviation which translates to Conservation Volunteers – Nature Guarding Cadets), and the other, based in Kayong Utara Regency is named REBONK (short for Bentangor Center Volunteers for Conservation). A major goal of these groups is to educate youth outside of the formal education system. Members receive training in skills such as organizational leadership, ecotourism and media.

Members of these youth groups regularly help with conservation activities, such as radio broadcasts and larger-scale special events like World Orangutan Day, Orangutan Caring Week, Earth Day, and Waste Awareness Day. Over the years they have held dance performances, concerts, interactive plays, talk shows, trivia nights, movie discussions, mobile libraries, and more. Some of our now-routine activities actually started out as ideas from youth volunteers, including making informational signposts about waste and other waste awareness activities, and social service activities such as fundraising for charity.



New REBONK members (front row) pose on the Mak Bagok beach with current members and GPOCP/Yayasan Palung staff (second row).

In 2022, 14 new members joined the 11th cohort of REBONK volunteers. These new volunteers come from many different schools throughout the Kayong Utara Regency. This month, from February 11th-13th, an inauguration was held at the Mak Bagok beach, in Pampang Harapan Village, in the Sukadana District. During the inauguration event, new volunteers participated in a variety of activities including learning about the environment, observing wildlife, and listening to the sounds of nature. Volunteers were also invited to discuss environmental issues such as waste, large-scale land clearing and flooding. The goal of this activity was then for volunteers to map out these environmental problems and discuss potential solutions.



New youth group members take part in an education activity during one night of the two-day inauguration event.

On the final day of activities, the official inauguration ceremony was held. New members joined GPOCP/YP staff and senior REBONK volunteers. A new REBONK president was also elected. Volunteer Widia will now replace the former president, Selvi Febbiani, in this role.

GPOCP/Yayasan Palung congratulates these new members of REBONK. We hope they continue to learn and spread conservation knowledge throughout the Kayong Utara and Ketapang regencies, and beyond!



REBONK volunteers hike through the forest to get to the Mak Bagok beach.

Building a New Camp at The Rangkong River Research Area

By Ahmad Rizal, Research Manager & Tri Wahyu Susanto, Research Director

The Rangkong River is located in Gunung Palung National Park, and was the location of massive illegal logging activities in the early 2000s. Around this river are three habitat types – freshwater swamp, peatland swamp, and kerangas (heath forest). This lowland forest area is home to a variety of wildlife within the Park. Because this forest was altered due to anthropomorphic forces (in this case, logging), the Rangkong River area has sparked new research questions for our project, and has been designated as a new research area in the Park.

Routine research activities began in the Rangkong area in 2016 by the long-term research project known as the One Forest Project. Then, in 2019, GPOCP/Yayasan Palung worked together with the Gunung Palung National Park Bureau (BTN-GP) to conduct a survey of the orangutan population in the Rangkong, as part of a larger census project throughout the Park. Since then, several foreign researchers have started to pilot short research projects to see the potential for longer term research that can be carried out at the Rangkong River location.

Now, our plan is to conduct research on orangutans and their habitat in the Rangkong area, while also continuing our regular long-term research at the Cabang Panti Research Station. In January 2021, our research team, in collaboration with BTN-GP, began routinely conducting research activities at the Rangkong location. This research began with monitoring orangutan nests and collecting phenology data along forest transects. Several students from the National University in Jakarta also assisted with this research.



Research team members at the old Rangkong camp in 2021.

Left to right: Ahmad Rizal (Research Manager/author), Toto (Field Assistant), Wahyu Susanto (Research Director/author), Udin (Camp Assistant)

In order to implement long-term research activities in the Rangkong, we needed a more permanent structure to accommodate a full-time research team. The old camp consisted of only a simple pole structure with a tarp overhang. So, in January 2022, we began constructing a new camp which will provide greater comfort and safety for researchers.

The process of building a camp at the Rangkong River site involved the local people of Tanjung Gunung village, which is directly adjacent to the National Park, and serves as an entry point for researchers to get to the Rangkong River and Cabang Panti by foot. The provisioning and purchase of materials was the first goal. We bought local wood to build the new camp, paying close attention to ensure that all the wood was obtained legally, and was not cut from within the Park or other protected forest areas. BTN-GP assisted with this, and strictly supervised the process of obtaining wood for construction.

Next, we needed to transport all the materials from Tanjung Gunung to the Rankgong River camp location, which is about 7 kilometers. Village members helped to float wood upriver and carry other materials over the course of two days. After all the materials arrived to the location, we could finally start the building process. We hired craftsmen from Tangjung Gunung to build the camp.



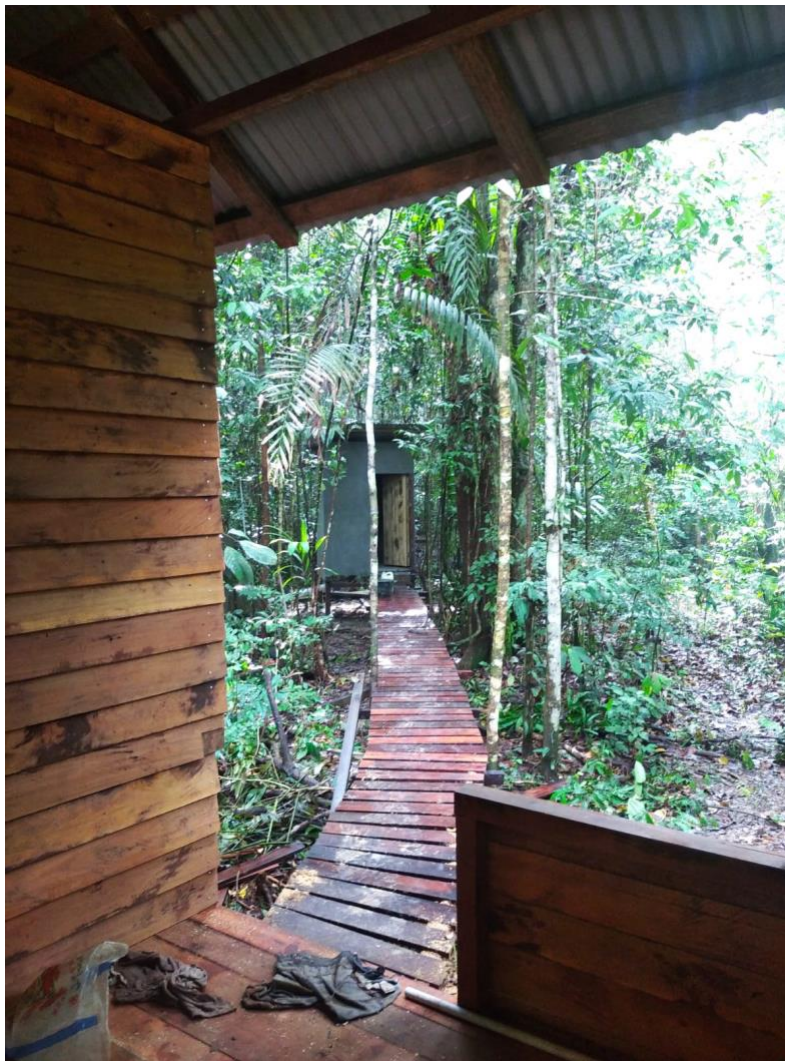
Wooden planks float upriver, from the dam at the edge of Tanjung Gunung to the Rankgong site.

The Rangkong camp consists of three buildings – the main camp for researcher lodging (with a small kitchen area and private sleeping room), an outhouse, and a small covered platform to house a generator. Throughout the construction process, we made regular visits to the construction site to supervise and make sure everything was going according to plan. The location of the camp is referred to locally as “bagan asam” which means “the mango camp” because this area of forest contains many mango trees. We plan to name the building at the Rangkong site “Camp Mangifera” after the Latin name for the mango genus.

On February 17th, less than two months from the start of construction, all the work was completed! We are very satisfied with the results of the construction of the new camp. Now we are even more excited to continue developing new research as this site. We are also confident that foreign researcher will be very happy with the camp and excited to conduct research here.



The new "Camp Mangifera" at the Rangkong Research site.



A raised path from the Rangkong camp leads to an outhouse.



A small roofed structure will eventually house a generator to provide electricity at the camp.

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.

*"You can't force people to care about the natural environment,
but if you encourage them to connect with it, they just might."*

– Jennifer Nini



All photographs © Tim Laman or © GPOCP