



Dear Friends and Supporters,

I am excited to kick off a new year with lots of new plans to increase our impact and our reach. This year we are continuing to expand our work in the *Hutan Desa* (village forests), helping local communities to successfully manage and protect their lands, providing a safe refuge for wild orangutans. We are growing our sustainable livelihoods groups and helping them to increase their ability to provide profitable alternative income that is compatible with orangutan protection and rainforest conservation. We have big plans to grow our education center, providing a larger space for education field trips as well as laboratory capabilities to support our research team and students. Our new research focus investigating orangutans in the formerly selectively logged Rangkong area is now in full swing. Boston University PhD candidate Laura Brubaker-Wittman joined the team last year to begin her research on orangutan habituation. I look forward to sharing our stories, successes and personal accounts of orangutan conservation and research over the coming year.

The first article this month, written by Petrus Kanisius, recaps the 2023 Annual Meeting which took place this month. All staff joined together for a jam-packed week of activities at our office in the town of Ketapang. Program Coordinator, Natalie Robinson, was able to travel to Indonesia to participate in the activities. GPOCP/YP is committed to fostering a diverse and inclusive environment both amongst our staff and in our work with local communities. Thus, this year we instituted a day long training with an Indonesian facilitator on issues of gender, diversity and inclusion as well as expanding our Code of Conduct to include all GPOCP/YP staff.

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Our second article comes from Mega Oktavia Gunawan, a West Bornean Orangutan Caring Scholarship (WBOCS) student who is currently conducting research at the Cabang Panti Research Station. Mega was accepted into WBOCS in 2018, and is now a student in the Faculty of Forestry at Tanjungpura University in Pontianak. As you will see from her article, Mega is a dynamic young Indonesian woman, embodying the hope for the future that is the key to protecting Indonesia's biodiversity.

I wish you all a happy and healthy February!

Sincerely,



Cheryl Knott, PhD  
Executive Director

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

## All Staff Gather for 2023 Annual Meeting

*By Petrus Kanisius, Environmental Education and Communications Coordinator*

Every year, Yayasan Palung (YP) holds an annual meeting. This year, the meeting took place from January 10th to 14th.

Annual meetings like this have become somewhat of a tradition. All staff from both the conservation and research teams gather together. We like to call this “Keluarga Besar Yayasan Palung” (the big Yayasan Palung/GPOCP family).





*The "Keluarga Besar (Big Family) Yayasan Palung/GPOCP" of 2023 with all conservation and research staff.*

We kicked off the meeting on the first day with 2022 program evaluations and presented on the many achievements from last year. The next day, each program manager presented about the plans for 2023 and received feedback from other team members. On the third day, we discussed our annual collaborative work plan with the National Park Bureau, which will be finalized in the next few weeks.



*We had fun using our bodies to spell out "YP 23" to commemorate the start of the New Year! Drone photo by Gene Estrada.*

In addition to the regular annual meeting activities, we also participated in a training workshop about gender, diversity, and inclusion, to increase the capacity and knowledge of the Yayasan Palung/GPOCP staff. This workshop was run by facilitator Umi Reni from Pusat Pengembangan Sumberdaya Wanita (the Women's Resource Development Center). Together, we worked to draft ideas for a program-wide Code of Conduct, to which all staff will commit.



*Ibu Umi Reni presents to staff during an interactive one-day workshop.*

We also held activities to further strengthen the bond between staff and foster a sense of kinship. We all traveled to Air Mata Permai Beach to play team building games and enjoy views of the sunset. We had so much fun!







*Staff play a game similar to "Simon Says." High school volunteer interns got to throw baby powder at the losers!*

On the last day, we worked together to start moving to a new office in the town of Ketapang. We practiced "gotong royong" (an Indonesian cultural concept of working together as a community, which directly translates to "mutual cooperation").

We all hope this year will be just as great as last year, if not better!



*Research staff members celebrate the New Year during a beautiful beach sunset!*

**Bridging Society and Science: Temporal Seed Germination Visualization**



Growth surrounds us – dynamic and often unexpected. People also grow, and this has happened to me, Mega. I come from the town of Ketapang in West Kalimantan, Indonesia and am currently studying Forestry at Tanjungpura University. In 2018, I was awarded a West Bornean Orangutan Caring Scholarship (WBOCS) from GPOCP/YP. Due to my interest in orangutans, I was excited to gain more access to conservation networks. What I didn't know then was that this would change my whole life. I used to spend my time in a small, square room doing digital work on a computer. I always saw reports on social media about climate change and about the decline of orangutan populations. I asked myself “What role do orangutans play in helping the forest grow and ultimately fighting climate change?”.



*The author, Mega, plays with clay at the Bayas River in Gunung Palung National Park.*

Conservation campaigns frequently referred to orangutans as “forest gardeners” because of their ability to disperse seeds, meanwhile large plantations view orangutans as pests. It is not rare to hear about human-orangutan conflicts. These different claims strengthened my curiosity, and eventually I decided my final thesis topic would be about seed germination. Before I proposed this thesis to my professors, GPOCP/YP was offering internship opportunities at Cabang Panti Research Station (CPRS). I thought it would be a great opportunity for pursuing my career development as a conservationist with an interest in visual science communication. Fortunately, in 2021, I got permission from the Gunung Palung National Park Bureau (BTN-GP) to go to CPRS and learn about the research going on there. Eventually, I proposed my thesis topic. To integrate my interest in visual science communication, my thesis will also use GIS and time-to-event analyses to create visual models to convey my results to the general public.

The process isn't so simple. While monitoring seed germination, I go to the field every day if possible. Occasionally, some samples are eaten by predators or covered with mold before the germination day. Of an initial 30 samples, 5 now remain in place. I also measure the seed distribution distance from “mother” plants to the location where orangutans defecated to know how far orangutans disperse the seeds. All of these location coordinates will be visualized using QGIS to make it easier to understand. I still have about 3 months left to finish conducting this research. In this time, I hope to collect sufficient data to test my hypotheses – the goal of all researchers!



*Left: Testing seed germination in the field. Right: One of the germination samples (Grewia sp.) that survived in the field. Photos by author.*

I wouldn't be able to follow these orangutans without permission from GPOCP/Yayasan Palung and the Gunung Palung National Park Bureau. It is such a rewarding opportunity and I am so thankful to GPOCP/YP who continue to support my growth. I am especially thankful for the scholarship program which has been a gateway to provide essential networking opportunities. I hope this program continues to exist and engage more future conservationists!





*Students Ari Marlina (left) and Mega (right) help out with fruit sample processing.  
Photo by Sumihadi.*

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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.*

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

*– Rainer Maria Rilke*