

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,

I'm excited to share a new article that we've published on *Mother-offspring proximity maintenance as an infanticide avoidance strategy in Bornean orangutans (Pongo pygmaeus wurmbii)*. This article was authored by Dr. Amy Scott, a GPOCP/YP and Boston University alumna, alongside Tri Wahyu Susanto (GPOCP/YP Research Director), Tatang Mitra Setia (GPOCP/YP counterpart and UNAS professor), and myself. Check out the sidebar to learn more.

Our first article this month was written by Field Director, Edi Rahman. Edi shares some interesting anecdotes and photos from recent fieldwork carried out by members of the Nipah Kuning Village Forest Management Board.

The second article was written by Sabta Pelari, who was recently promoted to the position of Rankgong Research Coordinator. Sabta worked previously as a Field Research Assistant at Cabang Panti Research Station since 2016, and now leads the research team at our new Rangkong research area camp. He writes about some of the research that's gone on there thus far.

I wish you all a happy and healthy April!

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IN OTHER NEWS:

New paper out now in the [American Journal of Primatology](#)! Authors Scott, Susanto, Setia and Knott found that male orangutan presence is associated with a change in mother-offspring distance and proximity maintenance. Mothers were responsible for this decrease in distance from males, which may be an infanticide avoidance strategy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cheryl Knott". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Cheryl Knott, PhD
Executive Director

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

SMART Patrols & Wild Orangutans in Nipah Kuning Village Forest

By Edi Rahman, Conservation Field Director

The Sungai Paduan Protected Peat Forest (*Hutan Lindung Gambut*, or HLG) makes up an area of approximately 6,788 hectares, most of which is peat swamp rainforest. This is a great habitat for many types of animals, including the critically endangered orangutan. In 2017, GPOCP/Yayasan Palung helped get this area the official *Hutan Desa* (Village Forest) designation. Since then, the area has been sustainably managed and utilized by the communities of the four villages it encompasses, namely Padu Banjar Village, Pulau Kumbang Village, Pemangkat Village and Nipah Kuning Village. GPOCP/YP continues to assist the communities to build their capacities to manage the land responsibly.

Specifically, the Nipah Kuning Hutan Desa Management Board (LPHD) was given the mandate to manage and utilize an area of 2,051 hectares. Throughout the year, various activities are carried out by the Nipah Kuning LPHD, including conducting regular patrols in and around the forest area. These patrols follow the Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool (SMART) model, which we have worked to train LPHD on over the past few years.

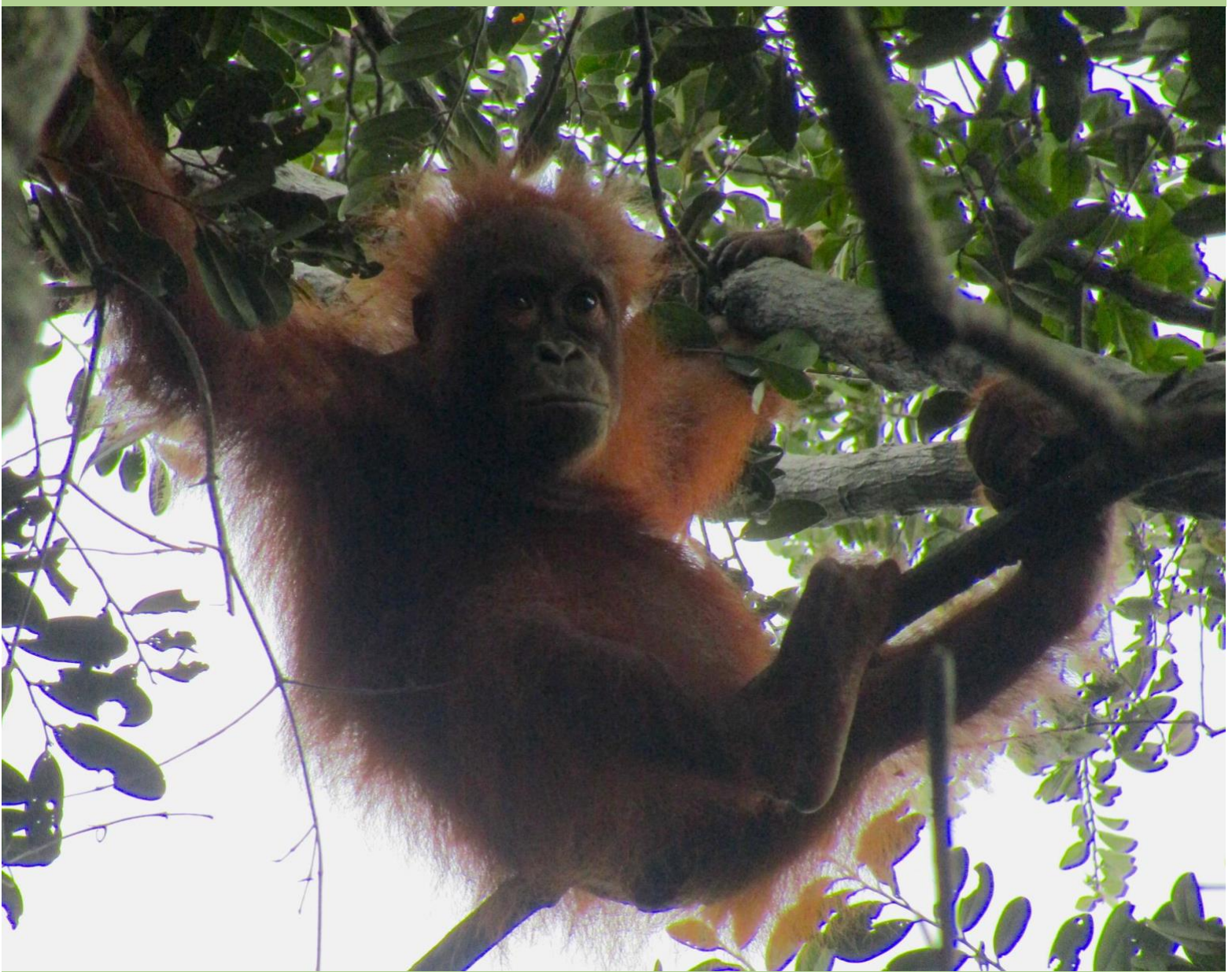
The Nipah Kuning SMART patrol team consists of four people. These members are responsible for carrying out patrols in order to monitor any illegal human activities (e.g., illegal logging, land burning, hunting), monitor and identify wildlife, and monitor and identify plant species found in the Hutan Desa.



Members of the Nipah Kuning LPHD SMART patrol team observe signs of illegal logging. Continued patrols will allow us to track trends of illegal activity over time, and continued LPHD presence helps to further deter such activities from happening.

During a recent SMART survey, the team identified seven orangutan nests, three sets of sun bear scratch marks, two signs of orangutan feeding, and one wild boar bed. They also heard the sounds of one white-crested hornbill and saw one snake egg. They even had first-hand observations of five orangutans, not far from where the team were camping!

As it turns out, nearly every time the Nipah Kuning SMART team conducts patrols, they encounter wild orangutans. When the GPOCP/YP team carried out recent biodiversity surveys, they too encountered orangutans, saw orangutan nests, and heard orangutan long calls.



A juvenile orangutan seen by the Nipah Kuning SMART patrol team during a recent survey.

The Sungai Paduan HLG landscape is known to be one of the pockets of orangutan populations outside of Gunung Palung National Park. Interestingly, this forested area connects to a Production Forest which is owned by the PT Mayawana Persada company. However, we hope that since this wood fiber concession has slated a special area for conservation, this forest is still utilized by orangutans to move between forests.

Seeing that these orangutans are thriving in the Hutan Desa gives us hope that the work we are continuing to do is making a real difference in the long-term protection of the wild Bornean orangutan.



The tarp camp set up by the Nipah Kuning SMART team during a recent patrol.

Following Orangutans in a Secondary Forest Area

By Sabta Pelari, Rangkong Research Coordinator

My name is Sabta and I now work as the Rangkong Research Coordinator for the Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program (Yayasan Palung). Before I started in this role in January, I served as a Field Research Assistant for seven years. Now, I stay at the new Rangkong camp throughout the month to conduct scientific research and collect data that will help us better understand how to conserve [orangutans living in degraded rainforests](#). Here, I explain some of the research we have been doing.



Sabta uses an iPad to collect data during an orangutan follow.

At the end of each month, we routinely carry out nest surveys at the Rangkong research area along eight different forest transects. Each transect is 1000 meters long. We also carry out phenology along 16 belts. Nest surveys are carried out by two field assistants, often accompanied by managers or students. Meanwhile, [Randha, the Phenology Coordinator](#), focuses on collecting phenological data. We have been collecting this data for almost three years now, since even before we started following orangutans at the Rangkong. When we first started doing these surveys, we only slept on the ground underneath a tarp roof!

After the Rangkong camp construction finished in the beginning of 2022, it has never been empty since. We have employed the help of members of the Tanjung Gunung village (where I also come from) to stay at the camp on a rotating basis. This not only helps our project, but helps support the Tanjung Gunung economy and deters local people from engaging in poaching or illegal logging activities.

At the beginning of 2023, on January 23rd, to be precise, we started working at the Rangkong camp at full capacity. First, I, accompanied by two field assistants (Toto and Jaka) and one university student (Ilham), carried out nest surveys. After Ilham trained on these methods for three days, he replaced me to take nest survey data. Then, on January 25th, two trail cutters and one camp cook hiked up to camp.

On January 26th, Rizal (Research Manager), Pak Edi (the head trail cutter/porter from Tanjung Gunung), and two other trail cutters from Tanjung Gunung began making new transects in the Rangkong research area. The next day, I joined the group also. After working for one week, we were able to complete 8,100 meters of new trails! This new trail system will be essential to get around the research area, and search for and follow wild orangutans.



The new Rangkong camp, which now houses GPOCP/YP staff full time.

On February 2nd, Field Assistants Sahril and Dang searched for orangutans along the new transects, using the same method we use at Cabang Panti Research Station. From February 2nd-4th, I went back to Cabang Panti for some training on data collection and management.

On February 5th, back at the Rangkong area, I met up with more team members who walked down from Cabang Panti to work on a new passive monitoring project. This included Natalie Robinson (Program Coordinator), Herman (Field Assistant), Hendri Gunawan (Hutan Desa Coordinator), and Robi Kasianus (Hutan Desa Field Officer). Together, we installed and checked camera traps, bioacoustic recorders, temperature loggers, and rain gauges, which are placed in both the Cabang Panti and Rangkong areas. Hendri and Robi joined to learn about the monitoring process since we also have equipment to use in two of the Hutan Desa (Village Forests).

The next day, February 6th, I spent the morning with Natalie to learn about fecal sample collection and processing. Later that afternoon, Natalie left to return to Cabang Panti and I got ready to search for orangutans. Sahril and Dang had already been searching since 7:00 that morning. Not long after, I heard a loud call from the forest. I assumed this was either Sahril or Dang signaling their location to one another. But then, Natalie returned back to the Rangkong camp to inform me that there were orangutans eating *Ficus* fruit just about 300 meters from the camp, on the trail leading back to Cabang Panti. Together, we rushed back to this location and I called Sahril and Dang via radio to tell them about the orangutans. Natalie then continued the journey back to Cabang Panti while I followed a mother and infant orangutan, who were “partying” with an adolescent female orangutan. How exciting that the first time we followed orangutans at the Rangkong we saw three different individuals! Sahril, Dang and I worked together to follow these orangutans until they made a night nest.



Sabta follows an orangutan named "Logan" at Cabang Panti Research Station. Sabta makes sure to maintain a distance of at least 15 meters from the orangutan at all times, as to ensure all data collection is safe and completely non-invasive.

Later, on February 17th, four more trail cutters and a substitute cook came to camp. After another eight days of work, we were able to complete about 80% of the new trail system! I hope that soon this area is just like Cabang Panti. Now, thanks to the new transects, as of March 17th, we have been able to follow orangutans a total of 45 times! As a community, we will protect the camp and the surrounding forest, and many people can gain economic benefit from working to help carry logistics to the camp on a rotating system. I am excited to be working in this new role, and can't wait to see how the new camp and research continue to grow over time.

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.

"The greatest danger to our future is apathy."

— Jane Goodall