

Code RED

an e-newsletter from your friends
in West Kalimantan

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Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program YAYASAN PALUNG

Dear Friends and Supporters,

Greetings from the Rangkong River Research Station! We finally have the ability to connect with the outside world here at our new satellite research camp using Starlink, though we are still working out how to make the signal stronger and more consistent. But this will be a real boon to our communication abilities between the research stations and the outside world! I have had a wonderful and busy few weeks in the forest and will share more updates once I return.

In this month's issue of *Code RED*, we hear from Pit, our Media Coordinator with the Environmental Education and Conservation Awareness team. Pit shares with us about the training event we held for middle school teachers on implementing *green school* programming in the classroom. It was a great success, and we love to see teachers getting excited about new and engaging material to deliver to their students.

We also hear from Ritika Sibal, a master's student from Boston University who is studying how orangutans move in the forest. She has had a great few weeks at Cabang Panti Research Station, getting acquainted with the forest and all the folks at camp, and collecting fantastic data using some new tools that we are excited about.

As we move into August, I hope everyone is enjoying their summer, and I thank you for your continued support!

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

Creating Green Schools: Teacher Training in Simpang Hilir District

By Petrus Kanisius, Media Coordinator, Environmental Education and Conservation Awareness

Each year, we host training events where local teachers learn how to incorporate environmental science and conservation in the classroom. This year's theme was ***Integration of Green Schools in Classroom Curricula***. Our Environmental Education team hosted the event in collaboration with the North Kayong Regency Education Office, Gunung Palung National Park Office, and the junior high school in Simpang Hilir.

The Simpang Hilir District Junior High School Teacher Training and Green School Ceremony was held at SMPN 04 Simpang Hilir, North Kayong Regency from Wednesday to Thursday (July 24-25, 2024). The villages of Simpang Hilir sub-district are the areas that we support through the village forest program. The junior high school, SMP 04, is located in Pemangkat Village, which has a village forest with an area of 1,245 hectares. Ensuring that children in an area like this grow up with knowledge and appreciation of their local environment will ensure that the village forest area is preserved for generations.



The Regent of North Kayong, Dr. Alfian, opens the Teacher Training event.

This event was opened by the Acting Regent of North Kayong, Dr. Alfian, M.M. He began by expressing his gratitude to the hosts of this event. He went on to introduce the objectives of the

program, with the main aim of preparing teachers to support the Green School Program in classroom. Green School, often called *Adiwiyata*, is a federal initiative that encourages the creation of knowledge and awareness of environmental conservation among students.

Dr. Alfian said that North Kayong Regency faces a number of environmental risks that require attention, such as the potential for forest fires in the dry season, the potential for flooding during high tide, and issues related to the large amount of garbage in the surrounding environment. This demonstrates the importance of governmental and community efforts in preventing and overcoming these problems. One of the goals of the federal Green School Program is to "get young people involved in environmental conservation efforts and the prevention of environmental damage," said Dr. Alfian.



The group, showing "L" for lestari (sustainability) poses with the Regent of North Kayong.

Our teacher training program not only fulfills our own objectives as an organization working to foster a culture of environmental stewardship in the region, but it also contributes to national and local government objectives in education. The North Kayong Regency Government has committed to supporting environmental conservation efforts through Local Content in Environmental Education for Early Childhood Education (Kindergarten) and Basic Education (Elementary School). This is strengthened through North Kayong Regent Regulation Number 79 of 2022 concerning Local Content of Environmental Education as a Mandatory Curriculum at the Early Childhood Education and Basic Education levels.

This training event was attended by 42 junior high school teachers in Simpang Hilir. The activity was also attended by Rahadi Usman, M.Pd as the Head of the North Kayong Regency Education Office. Also present was Edi Rahman, Field Director of Yayasan Palung.



Presenting strategies and resources for implementing Green School lessons in the classroom.

In his remarks, Edi Rahman thanked the Acting Regent for taking the time to attend the teacher training activity. Furthermore, Edi expressed his hope that the teachers who attended this training can absorb the environmental education materials that were delivered, and feel confident in sharing their knowledge with their students. Edi also explained about the various programs of Yayasan Palung, such as the scientific research and multiple conservation programs.

On the first day of the training, the opening ceremony was followed by a symbolic tree planting by the Acting Regent of North Kayong and the Head of the North Kayong Regency Education Office. Furthermore, the participants were given several environmental teaching materials in accordance with the theme of green school activities.



Symbolic tree planting by North Kayong Regent during the Teacher Training.

Widiya Octa Selfiany, the Manager of the Environmental Education program of Yayasan Palung, introduced the concept of green schools to the teachers who participated in the activity. We also invited several speakers including Mrs. Sri Puji Hartati, S.Pd., who delivered material related to the Local Content Curriculum Policy for Environmental Education in North Kayong, and Mrs. Purwati, M.Pd. and Adi Sugiarto, S. Pd, M. Pd., who delivered material on Incorporating Green School Materials into School Subjects.

On the second day, participants learned to make Ecoprints. This is a great way to teach students about plants in their local environment while also celebrating their beauty by creating art. We invited a facilitator from the Gunung Palung National Park Authority (TANAGUPA) as a presenter. Representatives from the TANAGUPA office who also contributed were Fadlun Arrayyan Bonde, S.I.P., Siti Roqayah, S.Si and Yadi. Yayasan Palung has a Cooperation Agreement with TANAGUPA and we collaborate on a number of activities, including this training event.



Learning how to make Ecoprints.

This teacher training event was a real success, with great discussions and lessons learned, and we received a positive response from all participants. We look forward to supporting teachers as they implement Green School programming moving forward.



Different styles of Ecoprints made during the teacher training event.

Not Quite a Walk in the Park

By Ritika Sibal, Master's Student at Boston University

Despite growing up in Indonesia, I had never set foot in an authentic Indonesian rainforest until this summer. Our family vacations typically involved visiting relatives in India or taking short trips to nearby beaches. As such, this summer has been one big, new learning experience. My journey to Cabang Panti began like many others—with a grueling five-hour hike through dense rainforest before reaching the research station. Although I am an avid walker (a prerequisite for living in

Boston), this hike was no walk in the park. Large roots covered the forest floor, fallen tree trunks served as bridges over rivers, and I kept my eyes glued to the ground to avoid tripping. Despite the challenges, I felt elated as I approached the station. This was it. This was what a year of preparation was leading up to. I was so close to actualizing a dream that I always thought would be intangible: becoming a true animal field biologist.



Ritika on her trip up to camp. She was accompanied by Jay (Research Volunteer) and Gunawan (GPOCP Botanist).

Upon entering the camp, I was greeted by friendly faces, and my excitement grew. It was my first time back in Indonesia after eight years, and I hadn't realized how much I missed it. Nostalgia washed over me as I listened to conversations, and my Bahasa Indonesia slowly returned. Indonesia is the only home I've ever known, and I was thrilled to be back.

I spent the first day acquainting myself with the camp and its facilities, preparing for the grueling three weeks ahead. I am a first-year master's student in Dr. Knott lab, and I was in Cabang Panti on a research visa and was there to collect data. My goal was to capture orangutan movement quantitatively through artificial intelligence. I aimed to compare two methods: one using visual videos and photos to train a pose estimation model (a model to predict joint placement from a video), and the other using a thermal camera. The visual data came from a 30-year repository collected by field assistants at GPOCP and did not require additional collection. However, the thermal camera data did. Thermal cameras focus on body heat, potentially allowing for quicker and more accurate orangutan tracking in the dense forest. In a forest filled with branches and lianas, an orangutan might be easily missed if using a visual camera. But, lacking heat, the plants all fade into a homogenous background when viewed through a thermal lens (below)—the orangutan becoming a clear center of attention. Collecting this data was the purpose of my visit. The responsibility was daunting, and I spent my first evening checking and re-checking my experimental design and equipment specifications. As night fell, I prepared for my first follow, hoping I was ready.



A still from a thermal video capturing Alfred, a flanged male.

I awoke at 3:15 A.M., sleepy but smiling. After getting ready, I put on my headlamp and headed to the main camp to meet the other field assistants. Shortly after 4 A.M., we set out to follow Alfred, an orangutan I knew well from spending the last year watching and organizing six years of videos. We traveled through the thick, dark rainforest to arrive at the nest before Alfred woke up. We waited in the dark, insects filling the soundscape. This is one of my favorite moments of the day, getting to watch both the sunrise and the orangutans with it. Seeing him in person was akin to meeting a favorite celebrity, you can't quite believe your eyes. Alfred was now traveling almost exclusively by ground. This meant quick hiking through swamps and hills, with a large video tripod on my back—a brutal welcome to the rainforest. I stumbled and fell frequently, ending the day thoroughly exhausted. Yet, watching Alfred navigate this swampy landscape with remarkable dexterity was awe-inspiring; it truly captured the essence of why I was interested in studying this species in the first place.



Ritika using her camera setup to capture Bibi and Bayas, a mother infant pair.

For the next three weeks, I followed orangutans daily, observing nearly every age-sex class: flanged, unflanged, female, juvenile, mother, and infant. I marveled at their agility as they surfed through trees, bending great trunks to their will. I was amazed by their strength as they ripped bark from a tree or caught themselves in what would have otherwise been a disastrous fall. I appreciated their beauty, and the way their fiery fur blended inconspicuously into the rainforest background, the perfect camouflage. Despite the rainforest's harsh environment and tendency to claim everything that inhabits it, orangutans navigate it expertly.



Ritika and field assistants on a morning follow of Bibi and Bayas. As the orangutans were eating, the team got a quick picture!

As my time at Cabang Panti ends, I feel immense sadness. There is no other way to put it, I will miss the team. In my lifetime, I have yet to meet people as hard-working and kind as those that I met here. Their support—helping me up after falls, clearing branches, and finding good angles for shots—was truly invaluable. I could not have done this without them. They are true guardians of the orangutans, and this research site could not be what it is without them. Though my time here was brief, I leave hoping this is not goodbye. I hope to return one day and reconnect with the wonderful people who made my first field research experience so special.

Goodbye, Cabang Panti. I will miss you!

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 cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around you. What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make.”

— Jane Goodall



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