

# Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program

**Code RED**

an e-newsletter from your friends in West Kalimantan

September 2020

Issue 93

Dear Friends and Supporters,

This past month I resumed teaching, both remotely and in-person, at Boston University for the fall semester. In Indonesia, our staff are continuing to adjust to this new normal. We have been fortunate that most of our activities have been able to resume in some capacity, and our dedicated Indonesian staff have been working hard to keep on track with all of our conservation and research targets. Now, more than ever, in the midst of the global COVID-19 pandemic, our conservation work is of utmost importance. We are continuing to learn how interconnected environmental and human health are. At GPOCP, we are evermore concerned about global health, as wildlife and habitat encroachment can cause detrimental zoonotic diseases. [Research has shown](#) that tropical forest edges, like those surrounding Gunung Palung, are major breeding grounds for novel viruses. Deforestation further exacerbates this issue, increasing the length of forest perimeters, and therefore the frequency at which human-wildlife interactions occur. It remains our mission to protect wild animals and wild spaces for the future health of humans and animals. Thanks to supporters like you, GPOCP can continue to fight for the health of our planet.

In our first article, GPOCP's Media Officer, Pit, writes about his recent experience joining a journalism training seminar in West Kalimantan, Borneo. Pit has been a vital part of our conservation outreach team since he began at GPOCP in 2010. Pit is responsible for reporting and publishing all our activities and achievements in local and national newspapers. He also regularly writes blog posts and manages our Indonesian language social media accounts.

Our second article comes from Research Director, Wahyu Susanto. Based in Jakarta, Wahyu typically travels to our field site at Cabang Panti every couple of months. However, due to COVID-19, he had been unable to make his usual trips. Last month, Wahyu was able to get clearance to visit. In the article, Wahyu shares his experiences from his most recent visit, and gives some updates from camp.

In the sidebar, you can learn more about some of the other activities that have been going on -- artisans creating cloth masks for COVID-19 and biodiversity surveys throughout each of our Customary Forests.

I hope you all have a happy and healthy October!

Sincerely,



**IN THIS ISSUE:**

Voicing Nature and Planting Trees on Critical Land

—

My Trip to My Second Home

---

**IN OTHER NEWS:**

*Our Sustainable Livelihoods artisan groups have joined forces to sew cloth masks during the COVID-19 pandemic. In total, they have made 6,000 masks to distribute throughout local villages. This generated a significant amount of income for artisans, while also helping the community.*



---

*Our team just finished up the remaining biodiversity surveys in 5 Customary Forests in the buffer zones surrounding the National Park. The surveys aim to understand the plants and wildlife in these village forests, with a focus on assessing orangutan population and available food trees.*



## Stories from My Media Trip: Voicing Nature and Planting Trees on Critical Land

By Petrus Kanisius, Environmental Education Communication & Media Officer

Last month I represented GPOCP as an attendee at a media training seminar organized by the Indonesia-based organization, Earthqualizer. I, along with a group of other journalists, were part of a two-day retreat where we learned about scientific writing, and traveled to remote forests to learn about their conservation initiatives.



*The author, Petrus (Pit).*

On the first day of training, we discussed the very important role of journalists to speak out for nature, voicing environmental information. Then, on the second day, I, along with fellow journalists from the region and around the country, travelled to the Customary Forest of Bebalan Rayak Village, in the Sungai Melayu Rayak District, Ketapang Regency. I met local and national journalists and met directly with the Customary Forest Management Board for Bebalan Rayak Village.



*The Earthqualizer seminar drew participating journalists from around Indonesia.*

I also met Pak Nikolaus Sukur, the Chairman of the Belaban Rayak Management Board. He explained that the land on which we were staying, which is now an official Customary Forest, was previously plagued with fires in 1997. Pak Sukur also said that he, along with the other members of the Management Board, are trying to not only rehabilitate this critical piece of land, but also develop tourism potential, which can support the local community. One idea they are currently working on is developing an area to take photos. The hope is that in the future, this can become a source of income for the Sungai Melayu community.

Similar to GPOCP's Customary Forests initiative, Earthqualizer helped this community to gain legal rights to the land a few years ago. Here, there are at least 47 types of animals consisting of 38 species of birds, 4 types of mammals, 3 types of reptiles and 2 types of amphibians. In 2018, the Indonesian Ministry of Environment and Forestry granted forest management rights to the Belaban Rayak community, where they now manage 3,383 hectares of critical land. That same year, reforestation efforts began in the area.



*The Customary Forest in Belaban Rayak.*

Now, almost every weekend Belaban Rayak has visitors that come to observe its beauty. People are drawn from the surrounding communities in the Ketapang and Kayong Utara Regencies. Hopefully, this area can become one of the tourist destinations in the Sungai Melayu District.

While here, seminar participants also were invited to help plant trees. Hopefully, the seedlings we planted will grow, and I can know that I've played a small part in rehabilitating this area.



*The seminar group plants trees in order to rehabilitate the land.*

Community members and visitors bask in the beauty of the forest. However, this area is very vulnerable to forest and land fires when the dry season arrives. This is always a serious concern of the people living around the forest. The community works together to protect the forest so that it can be sustainable for years to come. I'm grateful to have had the opportunity to visit Belaban Rayak, and learn from seminar facilitators and the people of the community.

# My Trip to My Second Home

By Wahyu Susanto, Research Director

On August 25, 2020 I made a trip to return to the tropical rainforest of Gunung Palung National Park, where Cabang Panti Research Station has become my second home. This trip was the first time I had been out of Jakarta, where I live, in 8 months during the COVID-19 pandemic.

I was a bit hesitant to take my usual summer trip, because of the threat of the coronavirus spreading. However, I traveled following a strict health protocol by always using hand sanitizer, wearing a mask and keeping my distance from other people. It is also required by the country of Indonesia that all passengers get COVID tests before boarding an airplane.

Once I landed in Ketapang, I immediately changed and washed all the clothes I wore during the trip. I waited 10 days in Ketapang before going up to Cabang Panti to ensure that I was in good health and did not bring the virus to this remote location.

After 10 long days, I excitedly took a road trip to go up to Gunung Palung with Ahmad Rizal (the new Assistant Research Manager) and Darmawan (one of our counterparts from the National Park Office). We drove to the village of Tanjung Gunung, which borders the Park, then walked leisurely for 5 hours until we arrived at camp. It rained the whole way there, which helped us to keep cool!

When I arrived at camp, I was quite surprised to see the changes that had occurred to all the buildings at Cabang Panti. The Gunung Palung National Park Office has been rebuilding the entire camp in order to support the ongoing research activities, with new and improved facilities. Hopefully, all the construction will be completed by the end of this year.



*Our new Assistant Research Manager, Rizal, searching for orangutans in the forest.*

While at CPRS, one of my biggest tasks was to help train our new Assistant Manager, Ahmad Rizal. Rizal was previously a student who conducted research at CPRS in 2019. After graduating university, he was interested in coming back to help manage the Orangutan Project in the field. He learned very quickly about the things he needed to do for his work.

Our laboratory assistant, Sumihadi, also trained him in our methods for processing orangutan feces, urine, and food samples.

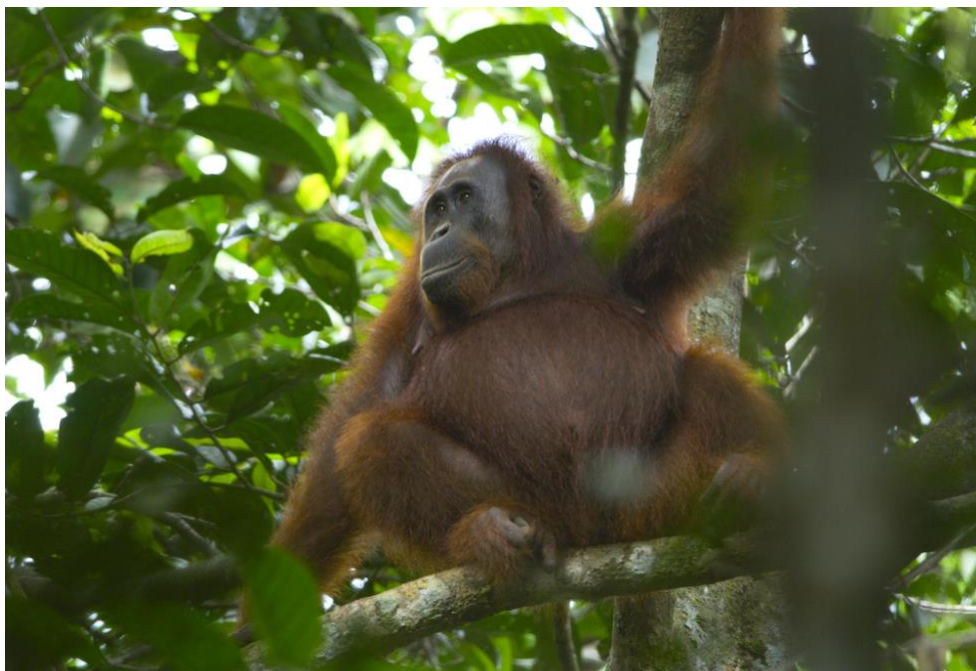
At the beginning of my time at Cabang Panti there were not many orangutans to follow. Depending on how many trees are fruiting or the weather, it can seem like there are more or less orangutans in the area. It can also be difficult to find orangutans because they typically travel alone, and often silently. So, when we search, we rely on other clues for insight that an orangutan is near, like fruit scraps or feces. One day, while walking in the forest searching, I came across scraps from an orchid plant. I saw part of the stem and leaves, but also noticed some stringy fibers nearby. An orangutan likely chewed these leaves, extracting the water, and spitting out the remaining fibers -- a behavior we have not yet observed for this particular plant! I also saw some scraps of tree bark nearby, which I believe was also left behind by an orangutan. Following clues like this helps us to eventually find orangutans.



*Remains of a tiger orchid that Wahyu found on the forest floor while searching for orangutans.*

Despite some days of unsuccessfully searching for orangutans, all of the field assistants were motivated to keep trying. During the weeks I was there, three individual orangutans were found – an adult female, Tari, and her daughter, Tawni, as well as Bosman, an unflanged adult male. The field assistants worked hard to collect data throughout the long days, even through the heavy rainfall we experienced. We continue to wear masks, keep at least 30m away from the orangutan we follow, and follow strict hygiene and safety protocols at camp and while in the forest.

Each time I return to Cabang Panti it is a joy to reunite with my friends from the Orangutan Project as well as the One Forest Project. Over the years it's like we've become one big Cabang Panti family.



*Tari the orangutan was eventually found with her daughter, Tawni, and followed by researchers. Photo by Tim Laman.*

*“Real change, enduring change, happens one step at a time.”*

*- Ruth Bader Ginsburg*



**Our Contact Information**

Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program  
P.O. Box G  
1661 Massachusetts Ave  
Lexington, MA 02420  
1-617-353-7723



All photographs © Tim Laman or © GPOCP

