


Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program



Code RED

an e-newsletter from your friends in West Kalimantan

June 2020

Issue 90

Dear Friends and Supporters,

The month of June has brought sadness, anger, and the demand for radical change to the front of our minds here in the U.S. The Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program stands in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement. We have recommitted to broadening participation in conservation and science, and building a more diverse, inclusive, equitable and just world for conservationists, researchers and people everywhere.

Our team are continuing to persevere through the COVID-19 pandemic and set a good example to others of the importance of social distancing. Luckily, the town of Ketapang, where our conservation staff work, has been minimally impacted and the virus is not known to have reached any of the remote villages where our field assistants come from. At our conservation office, we are cautiously starting to hold some small in-person meetings of 10 people or fewer. As an added precaution, our research team began wearing masks when following orangutans, and we continue our practice of staying at least 20 meters away from all animals. Orangutan follows have been quite limited these past few months (due to normal variation in orangutan travel patterns as well as an extended holiday vacation for assistants), but we continue to monitor the health of the orangutan population and conduct our ongoing phenology monitoring.

Last week I was invited to participate as a webinar panelist for World Rainforest Day. Along with other internationally-recognized conservationists, I was able to discuss and share ideas about the intersections of conservation, human and environmental health, and racial justice. Our first article explains more about this event and some of the inspiring messages that were shared.

Our second article comes from Endro Setiawan, a longtime colleague of GPOCP, who is now studying to get his Master's degree in Biology at Universitas Nasional (UNAS) in Jakarta, Indonesia. Endro has worked at the Gunung Palung National Park Office for the past 20 years, and served as the head of the Cabang Panti Research Station for 5 years. With a background in botany, he is now continuing on at UNAS, and will soon conduct research for his Master's thesis back at Gunung Palung. Endro is also a recent recipient of the [Ashton Award for Student Research](#), which supports investigations by students working on Asian tropical forest biology. We are so proud to help support Endro in the pursuit of his Master's degree!

Sincerely,



Cheryl Knott, PhD
Executive Director
[Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program \(GPOCP\)](#)

World Rainforest Day - Restoring the World's Rainforests During a Global Pandemic

By Natalie Robinson, Program Coordinator

Monday June 22nd was [World Rainforest Day](#). This holiday, first celebrated in 2017, serves as a day to raise awareness and encourage action to save the Earth's rainforests. To virtually spread awareness this year, GPOCP Executive Director Cheryl Knott was invited to join a live webinar hosted by Health in Harmony. The webinar, titled "Restore the World's Rainforests", featured other panelists from International Animal Rescue (IAR), Alam Sehat Lestari (ASRI), and Blue Ventures, and was moderated by Rhett Butler, the founder of the conservation news site, Mongabay. This timely discussion came as people around the world are grappling with the challenges and harsh realities surrounding the climate crisis, COVID-19 and racial injustice.





Rhett Butler

MONGABAY
FOUNDER AND CEO



Dr. Kinari Webb

HEALTH IN HARMONY
FOUNDER



Mahardika Putra

ASRI MEDICAL CENTER
PROGRAM DIRECTOR



Vik Mohan

BLUE VENTURES
MEDICAL DIRECTOR



Dr. Karmele L. Sanchez

**INTERNATIONAL
ANIMAL RESCUE**
PROGRAM DIRECTOR



Dr. Cheryl Knott

**G.P. ORANGUTAN
CONSERVATION
PROJECT**
FOUNDER

The webinar was made up of one moderator and five panelist speakers, each of whom are experts in their fields of conservation, research and medicine.

A common theme throughout the webinar was the importance of a holistic approach to conservation. Dr. Kinari Webb, Founder of Health in Harmony, stated that “the COVID-19 pandemic has illustrated for us all” something that she has been trying to teach the world for 20 years – that all of our well-beings are intertwined. This includes the well-being of humans around the world, as well as all the natural ecosystems. Dr. Karmele Llano Sanchez, Program Director of International Animal Rescue, who aims to protect, rehabilitate, and conserve wild orangutans, went on to reiterate that the only way to save animals is by protecting their habitat. She said you can’t separate humans and their health from the ecosystems in which they live. Dr. Cheryl Knott explained GPOCP’s holistic methods for conservation, speaking on the strengths of having mostly local staff, participating in community-based conservation, and our efforts to bridge the gaps that exists at the intersection of work in scientific research and conservation.

Mahardika Putra (Dika), Program Director at ASRI Medical Center, was another panelist that spoke on his work at the clinic on the outskirts of Gunung Palung National Park. When asked about his work and the sometimes overwhelming scale of the climate crisis we are in, he said “When you focus on problems, you will have more problems. But when you focus on possibilities, you will have more opportunities.” Dika went on to explain the importance of collaborations, which have been essential for the success of each of these organizations, stating that local communities already have solutions for most issues, but they are just missing the necessary resources, opportunities or knowledge. It is these long-term collaborations, and many people working together, which allow for successful conservation.



Aerial view of the rainforest canopy in Gunung Palung National Park. Rainforests are vital for the survival of life on Earth, providing fresh drinking water, absorbing carbon dioxide, stabilizing climate patterns, and providing a home to half of the world's plant and animal species. © Tim Laman

Moderator Rhett Butler next touched on the current events surrounding the Black Lives Matter movement in the US and around the world. Both the climate crisis and COVID-19 disproportionately affect marginalized people and Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC). He posed a question to the panelists about how the conservation and non-profit sectors can do more be inclusive and achieve more racial justice. The final panelist, Dr. Vik Mohan, is the Medical Director at community-based marine conservation program, Blue Ventures, in Madagascar. Vik explained that one of the most important things is listening to communities. It is small communities that are the stewards of the Earth's most magnificent biodiversity. These are some of the most vulnerable, poor, marginalized communities, and they also rely on these natural resources for their livelihoods. By putting such communities first and upholding their rights, we can address "some of the key fundamental inequalities that Black Lives Matter speaks to."

Panelists were also asked about COVID-19 and its effects on their organization's work. Cheryl explained that the current pandemic has further reinforced the importance of having local people running organizations. GPOCP has been fortunate to continue operating, unlike many other organizations that were forced to halt work and pull people out of field sites, because of our staff which can operate independently, either working remotely from their homes in Ketapang or within Gunung Palung. Others shared some of the negative and not-so-obvious effects of the pandemic, such as increased food prices and loss of jobs especially in the tourism sector, which has forced people to resort back to livelihoods like destructive fishing practices, illegal logging and mining, and hunting. These experts predicted that such environmental effects will likely be even more long-lasting than the health impacts of the virus.



A patch of freshly cleared forest in the buffer zone surrounding Gunung Palung that was burned to make way for a new agricultural project. Every minute, we lose 40 football fields worth of global rainforest. © Tim Laman

On a more hopeful note, panelists were asked about some of the ways their conservation efforts can be assessed, and some of the accomplishments they have had in their respective programs. Each person shared some of their most inspiring examples of successes, and many shared similar messages about the active process of hopefulness, and the idea that real change is local and non-linear in its impact. Cheryl touched specifically on Ibu Ida, one of our Sustainable Livelihood Program's lead artisans, who serves not only as an example of an inspiring success story, but also as an illustration of the importance of having local people independently conducting conservation work. Cheryl stated "One of the people who has inspired me the most is Ibu Ida. She learned to weave *Pandanus* mats from her mother as a child using these sustainable forest products, and she has really become a leader for conservation. She realized that the key to keeping [the production and sale of] these products going was to first help preserve and protect the forest... she now visits other villages and schools and teaches people the importance of protecting the forest and its resources."

The webinar concluded with words from each panelist about one thing listeners could do that day in order to make an impact. Karnele encouraged listeners to fight for social justice. Dika asked listeners to pay it forward and support causes you believe in. Vik reminded us to consistently remember that we are all connected, and that this idea should guide everything we do. Cheryl advised listeners to learn, as learning costs nothing, and knowledge is power. Kinari concluded with the advice to say thank you and donate to the communities that are living in these important, vulnerable rainforest areas.

You can watch the recording of this webinar [here](#) as well as some of the other virtual events that

Pursuing a Master's in Biology & Research Plans at GPNP

By Endro Setiawan

I am currently in my second semester of graduate school at the Universitas Nasional (UNAS) in Jakarta, Indonesia. I began taking courses last fall in order to receive my Master's degree in Biology. During my first semester I took 7 courses and finished final exams with a GPA of 3.95!

So far I have met 15 different lecturers at UNAS, each of whom are experts in their fields. This is one of the things that makes me so excited to study here, and feel excited and interested when I hear them speak about problems related to biodiversity in Indonesia. Outside of class, I have also participated in special trainings, seminars, workshops and even a book launch. I have also been given opportunities off campus, such as being an interpreter at an event in Kepulauan Seribu (the Thousand Islands), off the coast of Java.



Endro (right) looks at a tree in Gunung Palung National Park during a recent phenology assessment as part of our orangutan population survey.

My interest in plants and botany first began thanks to Dr. Cam Webb, a former researcher at GPNP. I conducted research with him not only within Kalimantan, but we also travelled to several locations outside Kalimantan such as Maluku, Papua and Flores. Participating in Cam's research made me learn more about plants, which also opened a door for me to learn about all types of biodiversity. Through my knowledge of plants, I also get to learn about other forest biodiversity such as primates, birds, and even reptiles and amphibians. Plants provide food and shelter for animals, so by studying plants, I automatically learn about their relationships with other animals. In addition, plants are the easiest bioindicator to study forests. By looking at plants you can see if the forest has ever been destroyed or if it is still original primary forest. The type of ecosystem in a forest can also be seen from the types of plants which grow there.

Because of this, I decided to take a course in Conservation Biology, and so far this has been my favorite class at UNAS. Conservation Biology is a very wide, multidisciplinary science and many of my courses are related to one another. Everything I learn is about how to save species and their habitats, as well as sustainable economic development. After I earn my degree, I will implement what I have learned, and apply these concepts to my work in Gunung Palung National Park.



Left to right: UNAS Professor of Biology Dr. Sri Suci Utami Atmoko, GPOCP Executive Director Dr. Cheryl Knott, Endro Setiawan, One Forest Project Director Dr. Andrew Marshall, UNAS Professor of Biology Dr. Dedy Darnaedi. This photo, taken last summer, marked the day Endro officially entered the Master's Program.

I have found myself particularly interested in Invasive Alien Species (IAS), which are an issue in Gunung Palung National Park. Of the several types of IAS, *Bellucia pentamera* is one of the biggest problems. The goal of my intended research project is to study *Bellucia pentamera* and its relationship with orangutans and other vertebrates in GPNP. I also want to compare the composition of orangutan foods in areas dominated by this invasive plant with foods growing in native forests. This will be very important for the management of the Park in the future.



Endro in GPNP. He will soon return to conduct research comparing fruits which grow in native forests and those which grow in areas dominated by the invasive Bellucia fruit.

Getting this scholarship to study at UNAS from GPOCP, Andrew Marshall (Director of the One Forest Project) and Cam Webb is such a special opportunity and important gift to me. I am so grateful. I will use this opportunity as well as I can to learn specifically about Conservation Biology and help bring this knowledge back to Gunung Palung in the future.





Endro planting endemic trees at the UNAS Arboretum alongside other Indonesian scientists, including Dr. Endang Sukara, Dr. Mien Rifai, Dr. Imran Tobing, Dr. Tatang Mitra Setia, Dr. Dedy Darnaedi and Dr. Jatna Suprianta.

“It really boils down to this: that all life is interrelated. We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied into a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one destiny, affects all indirectly.”

- Martin Luther King, Jr.



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