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## Becoming a Volunteer at Yayasan Palung & Welcoming Two New Field Research Assistants



Dear Friends and Supporters,

As the leaves start to fall from the trees here in the Northern Hemisphere, I am thinking of the verdant rainforest of Gunung Palung and of how our staff, students and volunteers in Indonesia have kept up the hard work that is protecting this critical population of wild orangutans. Well done, one and all!

Our first article this month was written by Vanessa Ryan Hadi, a new Indonesian volunteer at our office in Ketapang. Vanessa is serving as a volunteer for 3 months and has been a great help in supporting all of our conservation activities. Here, she shares a bit about her background and

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why she's interested in orangutan conservation, and writes about the activities at GPOCP/Yayasan Palung she's been a part of thus far.

The second article comes from our two newest Field Research Assistants, Jak and Dika, who joined our project back in March. As they explain in the article, Jak and Dika are not new to the forest of Gunung Palung, but have been hard at work learning about all aspects of our research project. They write about some of their daily tasks and share a few of their favorite aspects of their new job.

I hope you all have a safe and happy

November. Sincerely,



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

Donate to our Flood  
Recovery Fund

JOIN SWO  
TODAY

## Becoming a Volunteer at Yayasan Palung

*By Vanessa Ryan Hadi*

My name is Vanessa Ryan Hadi. I come from the city of Cibubur in Jakarta, Indonesia. In September 2021, I came to Yayasan Palung to volunteer for three months. I have a desire to learn and continue to gain knowledge, especially related to conservation. This has been my passion since I was 14 years old when I watched a television interview with a French man named Aùrelien Francis Brule, often nicknamed Chanee. On the show "Kick Andy" he explained how he went to Indonesia and created a non-profit organization that focused mainly on gibbons, as well as saving land that is important animal habitat. Before coming to Yayasan Palung, I previously traveled to Germany for a cultural exchange program for 16 months. I lived in a small town called Diez, in the Rheinland-Pfalz district. Last April, I returned back to Indonesia and had a strong desire to volunteer at an NGO that worked towards saving orangutans and their habitat. I am especially interested in orangutans because they are endemic to Borneo and Sumatra, and they are threatened with extinction.



*Vanessa leads a discussion during an Environmental Education Expedition in Desa Pengkalan Jihing, Pengkalan Teluk Village.*

Yayasan Palung (YP) was a particularly attractive place of study for me because this organization not only focuses on orangutans, but also their natural habitat, the forest. In addition, the programs at YP cover all aspects related to forests and orangutans – the research program at Cabang Panti in Gunung Palung National Park, the environmental education program, animal rescue, monitoring and investigation, sustainable livelihoods, and the scholarship program (the West Bornean Orangutan Caring Scholarship).

These programs are also similar to my personal vision of forest restoration and forest use, because in my opinion, there are various aspects that must be improved and changed in order to restore the forest. The most basic thing is to replace the source of state revenue on a large scale, so that deforestation can be controlled and reduced. In addition, environmental education must always be given so that the community can continue to increase their awareness of the importance of the environment and the urgency of climate change. Additionally, the government should have an important role in efforts to reduce the acceleration of climate change.

During my time as a volunteer at Yayasan Palung, I have participated in several activities including: environmental education expeditions around Gunung Palung National Park, classroom lectures, mentoring of conservation youth group volunteers, and various sustainable livelihoods program activities in villages and Customary Forests. The most challenging yet fun activity has been conducting biodiversity surveys in the Customary Forests.





*Vanessa collects data on plant species found in a Customary Forest during a biodiversity survey.*

The biodiversity survey took place mainly in peat swamp forest areas in the “Kumbang Betedoeh” Customary Forest of Pulau Kumbang village and the “Alam Hijau” Customary Forest of Pemangkat village. Both areas are located in the Simpang Hillir sub-district in Kayong Utara Regency. This was my first time ever entering a peat swamp, and we conducted the survey for multiple days, camping each night within the forest. I worked alongside members of the Yayasan Palung staff, as well as the Village Forest Management Board (LPHD).

I learned to identify and record various types of plants in the forest, identify types of orangutan nests, and encountered various species of mammals directly by sight and indirectly by sound. I saw many bird species including the golden horned woodpecker, great gray woodpecker, spotted kestrel and gray-chested jungle flycatcher. I also saw a green pit viper. Altogether, we recorded over 400 trees in the forest, 50% of which were orangutan food trees. The rare tree species we found are known locally as ramin (*Gonystylus bancanus*), meranti batu (*Shorea spp.*), punak (*Tetramerista glabra*) and jelutung (*Dyera costulata*). I am so grateful for the experiences I have had at Yayasan Palung and have made many friends along the way! I am excited to see what is in store for the rest of my time here.





*Vanessa (center) stands alongside the rest of the biodiversity survey team before they begin their expedition into the field.*

## Welcoming Two New Field Research Assistants

*By Jak and Dika, Field Research Assistants*

*In March 2021 we hired two new field research assistants to work at the Cabang Panti Research Station in Gunung Palung National Park. Upon hiring, the two new assistants, Dika and Jak, began their training. Luckily, they were already familiar with the orangutan project and the site, having worked previously as field assistants for the One Forest Project at Cabang Panti.*

*During the first 3 months, Dika and Jak received in-depth training on all aspects of project data collection. They learned about how to search for orangutans, how to take data on orangutan behavior, how to identify orangutan food items, and how to collect orangutan urine and fecal samples. They also reinforced their skills at collecting phenology data on orangutan food trees and lianas.*





*New field research assistant, Dika, looks through his binoculars to observe an orangutan at Cabang Panti.*

*Here, Jak and Dika share a bit about their experiences so far:*

Hello, my name is Jak and I come from Sukadana village in Kayong Utara Regency. And my name is Dika and I come from Sedahan village, also in Kayong Utara. We are both so happy to be able to return to Cabang Panti Research Station once again. We have each worked here for many years, and when offered the opportunity to work here again, we did not hesitate to immediately say yes! Cabang Panti is like our home, and every person who works here with us is like our family. This place also makes us appreciate the beauty of all the flora and fauna of Indonesia. The presence of orangutans in Gunung Palung makes it an excellent place to conduct research. Since we love it here so much, it has been extra special to return back as we continue to learn new things.

So far, one of Dika's favorite experiences has been to take data on orangutan behavior, especially having the opportunity to watch orangutans construct nests to sleep in. He is excited to continue this work both for the project, but also his own personal enjoyment, as he finds the work very fulfilling. Jak said that though he has worked at Cabang Panti for over 7 years, he has only now been able to experience following orangutans from their morning nest to night nest when they fall asleep. He also watches how orangutans eat and particularly loves to watch mothers with their offspring.





*A mother orangutan, given the name Kabar, and her offspring, Kamil, in Gunung Palung National Park. Observing mother-offspring pairs is one of Jak's favorite parts of following orangutans. Photo by Tim Laman.*

We are both so happy and hope to continue to work on the project for a long time. We are now more passionate than ever before about preserving this beautiful forest and all of its living things. Let's protect orangutans and their habitat!





*Jak collects orangutan behavioral data on an iPad during a focal follow.*

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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*

*"What happens to one of us happens to us all.  
We can starve together or feast together."*

*- Robin Wall Kimmerer*

**Our Contact Information**

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



<https://www.savegorangutans.org/>

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