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**GPOCP: April 2022 - Our High School Intern & Assessing Customary Foresty Habitat Quality for Orangutans**

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Dear Friends and Supporters,

***IN THIS ISSUE:***

The holy month of Ramadan is coming to a close, and most of our staff are preparing for the holiday of Eid al-Fitri, which begins tomorrow. They will enjoy a relaxing break after another month of hard work. Eid Mubarak to those who celebrate!

Our first article this month comes from our intern, Alejandro Merritt. Ale, who is finishing up his senior year of high school, has remotely interned for our program for the past year, educating the public through creative new videos and presentations, and raising a whopping \$11,000! In his article, Ale shares about his experience and some of the important lessons he's learned. We wish him success with his future endeavors as he begins at Vanderbilt University this fall!

The second article was written by GPOCP/Yaysan Palung Botanist and Survey Coordinator, Andre Ronaldo. Andre writes about surveys he helped to conduct last year in our Customary Forests and explains how studying the presence of different tree species in a forest can help us to assess habitat quality for orangutan populations.

Be sure to check out the sidebar where we share some other exciting news. I wish you all a happy and healthy May!

Sincerely,



Cheryl Knott, PhD  
Executive Director

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

## Saving Orangutans with the Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program

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## Assessing the Habitat Quality of Customary Forests for Orangutans

### IN OTHER NEWS:

*We're excited to share a new partnership with [Wendy Barnes Design](#)! These orangutan patterned accessories are for sale now. 10% of proceeds will be donated to our project to help [#SaveWildOrangutans](#). Shop the collection [here](#).*



*On April 22nd we celebrated Earth Day! Check out our [Indonesian language blog](#) to see some of the activities that took place.*

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# Saving Orangutans with the Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program

*By Alejandro Merritt, GPOCP Intern*

I am a senior in high school from San Francisco, California. For just about a year, I have worked remotely with the Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program. It has been amazing. In this time period I have had the opportunity to work on numerous projects to benefit endangered orangutans from educating others with a short YouTube animated video, giving presentations to children at my old middle school, and raising \$11,000 for GPOCP.

Discovering the plight of orangutans was one of the most important learning events in my life. As a high school sophomore, a bit aimless after basketball was canceled during the onset of the pandemic in early 2020, I was searching for a hobby. I have always loved animals, and as I learned more about the critically endangered status of all three orangutan species, I knew I had found a meaningful way to spend my time. It was orangutan conservation.

I began my work by researching and taking notes on the biology, ecosystem, unique qualities, and threats faced by our incredible orangutan cousins. Gradually, I fell in love with orangutans, and I decided to do two things next. One was to make a small contribution of money to an impactful orangutan conservation organization. The second was to provide education to others and shed light on the current status of the orangutan species. I chose to do this through the creation of a short, educational animation titled "10 Cool Facts About Orangutans." I learned to use Adobe programs with a remote tutor, and I then spent four months creating and finalizing my animation. In February of 2021, I posted my video on YouTube, which now has over 2,000 views. Then, using my animated video and a short slideshow presentation, I began to give short Zoom and in-person presentations to 2nd, 3rd, and 4th-grade students from my elementary and middle school.

In March of 2021, I reached out to the Founder of the Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program, Dr. Cheryl Knott, and was delighted when I was given the opportunity to work with her organization. The first thing I did was re-animate my video to include a section about GPOCP and their five conservation programs. I then created my [personal website](#), where you can learn about the plight of orangutans as well as donate to GPOCP.



*Alejandro's video, 10 Cool Facts About Orangutans.*

*Alejandro worked to research facts then direct, animate, write, voice and edit this video! Now, we can use the video to educate the public and draw support for our program.*

As a final and huge project, I decided I would set a goal of raising \$10,000 for this incredible organization. The process of brainstorming, planning, and raising money was very difficult at times, but I am so glad to have been able to contribute to the lives of the orangutans at Gunung Palung National Park.

I should say more about the fundraising, because by far it was the most challenging and rewarding aspect of my work for GPOCP. I began the fundraising by brainstorming ideas with my father regarding the best approaches to succeed. We concluded that starting a GoFundMe and sending out emails to the friends and families from my younger brother's middle school would be a good test-run. I wrote a lot of emails in the coming weeks, and we received a steady flow of responses and contributions.

After spending several weeks fundraising through GoFundMe, I began to realize that a majority of the contributions were smaller than I had anticipated. In order to reach my goal, I decided to strategize once more with my father. Together, we decided to create a commitment form with five donation options, where contributors could give a pledge amount without having to enter any credit card information. I also re-drafted my email template to include more extensive information regarding the threats imposed on orangutans by the palm oil industry, and the incredible impact GPOCP has had through their five

conservation programs. Lastly, I decided to sell lemonade with the help of my younger brother, and I organized a bake sale at my high school, from which I raised nearly \$200.



*Alejandro hosts a lemonade stand at his home in San Francisco to raise money for GPOCP.*

Upon concluding our next round of email campaigns using the new and improved materials, I noticed that we were now receiving more responses and larger donations. I continued to tweak the form and email templates throughout the next couple of months, and, after many email campaigns, I managed to raise more than \$11,000 from GoFundMe and form commitments!

Working with GPOCP has been an incredible opportunity for me to learn about conservation, fundraising, nonprofits, digital media, and communication skills. But, most importantly, it has been an opportunity for me to do a small part in protecting a beautiful animal that has for decades faced the consequences of human greed and corruption. Since I first began my research, it has always broken my heart that the

orangutan, an animal so genetically and evolutionarily similar to human beings, was on track to go extinct, and we, humans, are the cause of this.

While I learned a lot from my early work in creating my video, giving presentations, and creating my website, it was fundraising that taught me the most. Working with GPOCP on fundraising was the first time that I was directly involved in the finances of orangutan conservation. Business and conservation are the two largest areas of focus that I hope to explore further during my next four years at Vanderbilt University, where I will begin in the fall.

I am forever grateful to GPOCP for giving me the opportunity to contribute to such an incredible organization. I would especially like to thank my supervisor, Natalie Robinson, for being so helpful and kind to me throughout the process of fundraising and other projects.

## Assessing the Habitat Quality of Customary Forests for Orangutans

*By Andre Ronaldo, Botanist and Survey Coordinator*

*Hutan Desa* (which directly translates to “village forests”) are forests where the community has been given management rights with the aim of preserving the forest and the welfare of the surrounding community. *Hutan Desa* play an important role in supporting the preservation of biodiversity, including the survival of various types of wildlife within it. In our efforts to help manage *Hutan Desa*, we conduct surveys on the orangutan population and orangutan habitat quality each year.

In 2021, we conducted surveys of the quality of orangutan habitat in 6 of the *Hutan Desa* which are assisted by Yayasan Palung/GPOCP. Specifically, this was within the Sungai Paduan protected forest landscape (with the *Hutan Desa* of Padu Banjar, Nipah Kuning, Pemangkat and Pulau Kumbang) and in the production forest landscape of Sungai Purang (with the *Hutan Desa* of Penjajaan and Rantau Panjang).



*A member of the survey team, who is part of the Hutan Desa Management Board, affixes a metal tag to a tree during the survey.*

During these surveys we sampled 16 transects with a length of 1000 meters each, and within these were 64 plots measuring 10 x 100 meters. Each transect was divided into 4 plots, with a spacing of 200 meters between each plot. We then recorded all types of trees within these plots with a diameter of 10cm or greater.

The habitat at these survey locations is generally secondary peat swamp. Based on the survey results from last year, 102 different tree species were recorded in the Sungai Paduan landscape, and 94 species were found in the Sungai Purang landscape. The species with the highest importance value index (IVI) in Sungai Paduan was *Listea gracilipes* with an IVI of 30.82%, followed by *Lithocarpus bancanus* (IVI 22.23%) and *Stemonurus secundiflorus* (IVI 15.96%). Meanwhile, the highest IVI in Sungai Purang was



*Alseodaphne bancana* (IVI 23.51%), followed by *Listea angulate* (IVI 17.47%) and *Elaeocarpus masterii* (IVI 15.96%).

A high IVI value means that plants have better adaptability, competition and reproductive ability than other plants. On the other hand, plants with a low IVI may even have the potential to disappear from the local ecosystem because of their small numbers. The number and distribution of trees in both of these landscapes that we surveyed indicate that the forests are generally disturbed because the dominant species typical of peat swamp forests (e.g., *Gonystylus bancanus*, *Dyera costulata*, *Tetramerista glabra*, *Palaquium* spp., *Shorea* spp.) are not dominant here, based on the results of the IVI calculation.



*The author, Andre, takes data during the survey.*

The species diversity index ( $H'$ ) in both landscapes ranged from 3.64 to 3.89 (indicating high species diversity). The species uniformity index ( $E$ ) in both landscapes ranged from 0.79 to 0.86 (meaning

that the distribution of individuals in each species was relatively equal/even). The species richness index (R) in both landscapes ranged from 14.01 to 14.45 (meaning high species richness). Lastly, the species dominance index (C) in both landscapes was the same, at 0.03 (meaning that no single species is dominant).

The percentage of orangutan food trees in both landscapes ranged from 76.08-76.27% (suggesting that these habitats are ideal for orangutans). The ideal habitat for orangutans is forest that has 60-80% orangutan food trees, 80-90% fruit-producing trees and trees with different fruiting seasons, and 30-40% fruiting throughout the year. Several types of orangutan food trees that are common in the Sungai Paduan landscape include *Litsea gracilipes*, with a density of 44.17 trees/hectare, *Lithocarpus bancanus* (37.71 trees/ha) and *Palaquium cochleariifolium* (14.58 trees/ha). In Sungai Purang, the predominant types of orangutan food trees include *Litsea angulata* (30.63 trees/ha), *Elaeocarpus mastersii* (23.75 trees/ha), and *Palaquium leiocarpum* (16.88 trees/ha).



*A strangler fig identified during the survey. The region is home to a large variety of figs (Ficus spp.) which are commonly consumed by wild orangutans.*

The distribution of orangutan populations is strongly influenced by habitat conditions, especially the productivity of their food-producing trees. In general, based on the analysis of data from these surveys, the two landscapes have relatively equal orangutan habitat quality. Both landscapes are successfully providing safe refuge for orangutan populations in the Gunung Palung landscape. However, it is important to note that during these surveys we also observed forest disturbance from illegal logging and burnt areas, which caused many gaps in the forest canopy. This further emphasizes the importance of our multi-faceted conservation and research approach – no one activity can solve the plight of orangutans on their own.

*"The Earth is what we all have in common"*

*– Wendell Berry*



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