
GPOCP: October 2023 - Fire Prevention and GP Memories from Program Coordinator



Dear Friends and Supporters,

I hope this edition of Code RED finds you well. It was a busy October, both for me here in Boston and for the dedicated staff in Indonesia. A few pieces of news to share: Our Field Director in Indonesia, Edi Rahman, was quoted in [this](#) Mongabay article that reveals some shocking information about a corporation in our region that is responsible for an unprecedented rate of new forest destruction. Our staff is monitoring the situation and is in communication with activist groups and other NGOs who are all hoping that bringing international attention to the situation will put an end to it.

On a very happy note, we received word that our 8th Hutan Desa (Village Forest), Lubuk Batu, has received the final official verification, bringing us to a total of 8,903 hectares of

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forest that is protected, through our efforts, outside of the boundaries of Gunung Palung National Park! This is the result of years of hard work and dedication by the people of Lubuk Batu and our team working together, and a win for conservation and the land rights of this rural community!

For this month's newsletter, we have an article by Hendri Gunawan, our Hutan Desa Coordinator, writing about the training event we hosted with several collaborators, teaching about ways that people can clear land without burning. As you have read about previously, fires are increasingly common and severe in the dry season and taking measures like this well-attended training event are of the utmost importance for fire prevention.

The second article is by our outgoing Project Coordinator, Natalie Robinson. Natalie has been with us for years in different roles, and she has played an integral part in our operations. She has just started graduate school at Rutgers University to earn her PhD. We are sad to see her go but very excited for her new journey. Good luck, Natalie!

Wishing you all a peaceful November!

Sincerely,



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

Taking Action to Prevent Wildfires

By Hendri Gunawan, Hutan Desa Coordinator

Fires present an ongoing and serious threat to wild orangutans, and the forests that they inhabit, especially in areas outside the National Park that are close to human habitation. In Simpang Hilir District, North Kayong Regency, and particularly in the Village Forests (Hutan Desa) we work with, there are peat swamp forests which are at high risk of fires during the dry season. There are some who still clear land for agriculture by burning it because they view it as fast and cost effective. However, the negative impact of this practice, especially on peatlands, is quite significant. If peatland fires spread, they will have negative social, cultural and economic impacts such as the loss of livelihoods for communities around the forest. Humans can be disrupted by fires in other ways; new pests can emerge and respiratory tract infections increase. Forest fires can have substantial ecological and environmental impacts, including the loss of species, changes in land use and designation, and changes in water quality and quantity. These fires even have an adverse effect on international relations because of the widespread smoke emitted, which can cause protests from friendly countries.



The speaking panel at the Land Clearing without Burning training workshop. Our Field Director, Edi Rahman, is on the far right.

From the end of August 2023 – September 2023 fires occurred in both Ketapang Regency and North Kayong Regency, including several areas around Village Forests in Simpang Hilir District (Padu Banjar Village, Pemangkat Village and Nipah Kuning Village). The fire started when several villagers set fires to clear agricultural land and plantations, which resulted in the fire spreading and becoming uncontrolled. The Village Forest Management Boards had to work hard together with partner institutions (KPH Kayong, Manggal Agni, Fire Care Community) to extinguish the fire so that it did not spread to the Village Forest area.



A full house, listening to the panel discuss the importance of fire prevention.

In response to this, Yayasan Palung, together with the Kayong Forest Management Unit (KPH) and Fauna and Flora International (FFI), held a training on Land Clearing without Burning (PLTB) in Penjalaan Village that included participants from several villages in Simpang Hilir District (Padu Banjar Village, Pulau Kumbang Village, Pemangkat Village, Nipah Kuning Village, Penjalaan Village, Rantau

Panjang Village) and Sukadana District (Riam Berasap Jaya Village, Sejahtera Village and Pampang Harapan Village). The PLTB training was attended by 77 participants consisting of representatives from the Gunung Palung National Park Office, Kayong Forest Management Unit (KPH), and the Indonesian National Army, Police, Field Agricultural Extension (PPL), and the Agriculture and Food Service of North Kayong Regency, Village Forest Management Board members, and farmer groups assisted by Yayasan Palung and Tanjungpura University students.



*Top: Demonstrating how to make solutions to alter soil pH and fertilize the soil.
Bottom: Practicing manual land-clearing techniques that do not involve burning.*

This training activity was carried out for 2 days (11-12 October 2023). The training facilitator was Professor Joko Wiryanto (Independent Agricultural Extension Officer). The material provided on the first day covered the negative impacts of land processing by burning, making F1 Embio (which functions to reduce acid levels and neutralize soil pH), and making environmentally friendly KCL (potassium chloride) fertilizer. On the second day, land clearing without burning was practiced on peatland belonging to one of the training participants.

Mrs. Euis Herawati, the Head of the Kayong Forest Management Unit (KPH), in her speech said that several months ago, the Kayong KPH had to work hard to deal with the fires that occurred in several sub-districts in North Kayong. The number of hotspots that appeared in the Sipongi application was 1,128 points. The fires in North Kayong Regency were dominated by peat and fern fields, which of course contain highly flammable materials under dry conditions. The Head of KPH Kayong hopes that the village management boards (LPHD) and KPH can continue to work together to monitor, prevent, and extinguish fires when they occur.



The group of participants at the land clearing without burning workshop.

Mrs. Euis Herawati also expressed her gratitude to Yayasan Palung for providing fire extinguishing equipment to several LPHDs in Simpang Hilir District. The fire extinguishing equipment (water pump machine) that we secured for the LPHD is very lightweight, so it is easy to carry during extinguishing activities and is very helpful in firefighting efforts. The President of the Republic of Indonesia has also conveyed directions "to find a permanent solution so that people do not clear land by burning it." So, this PLTB training is one solution based on the needs that are clear in the communities we work with, and in alignment with the direction of the President of the Republic of Indonesia.

Sampai Jumpa Nanti (See You Later)

By Natalie Robinson, Program Coordinator

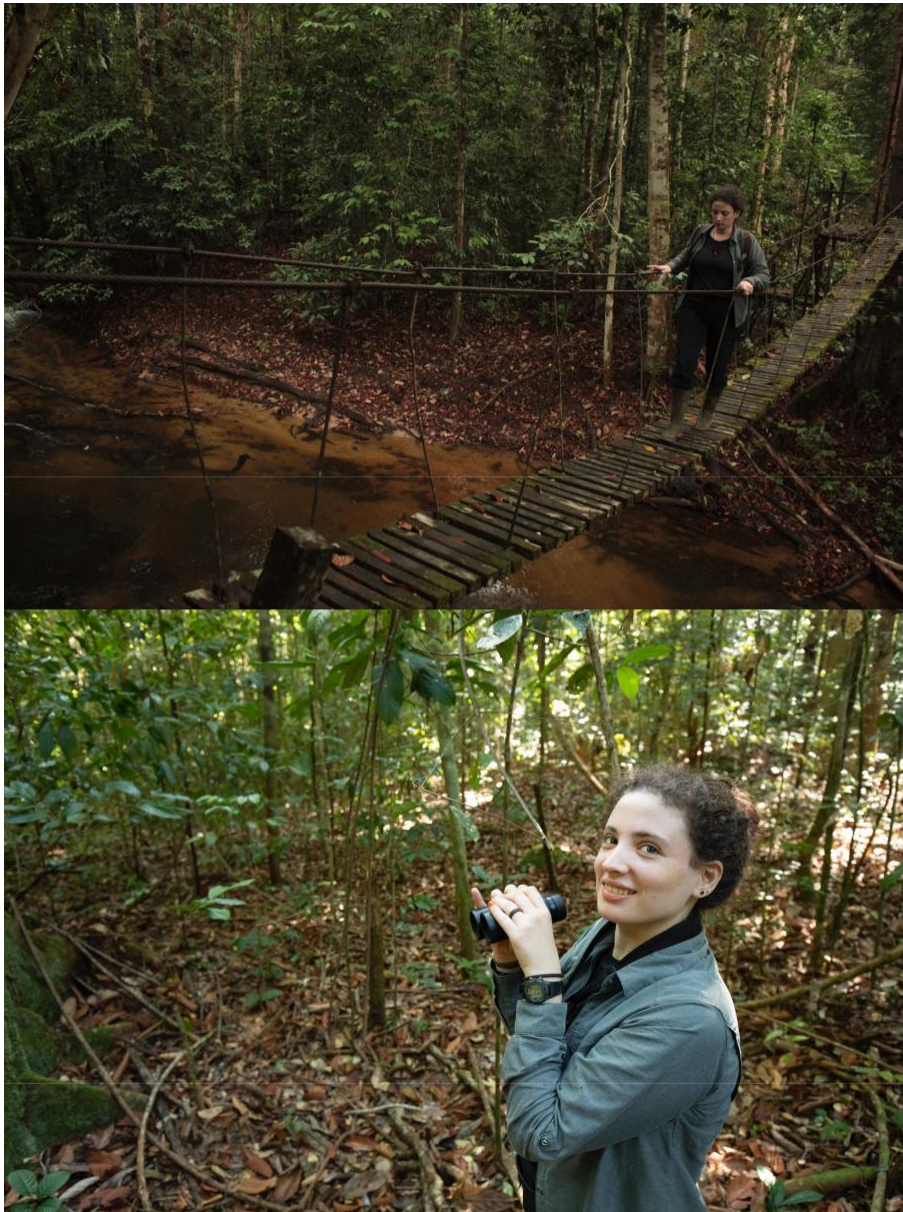
For the past seven years I have been a part of the GPOCP/Yayasan Palung team, most recently as the Program Coordinator. In August, I said a bittersweet goodbye to my colleagues and friends at GPOCP/YP as I began my doctoral program at Rutgers University, where I am now a member of the Laboratory for Primate Dietary Ecology and Physiology in the Department of Anthropology.

I started my involvement with GPOCP/YP as an undergraduate student at Boston University, where I helped with data management and lab work, eventually completing a senior honors thesis on free simple sugars in orangutan foods. After graduating, I spent a year living and working at the Cabang Panti Research Station, Gunung Palung National Park as a Research Assistant. It was then, after years of working with data in the lab, that I witnessed orangutans in their natural habitat and developed a deeper understanding of and appreciation for orangutans and their conservation.



Natalie, fourth from the left, with the Cabang Panti research team in 2018.

When I hiked out of the research station at the end of my year-long stay in 2019, beginning the long journey back to the U.S., I saw three orangutans at the dam that marks the edge of the National Park and supplies water to the village of Tanjung Gunung. Accompanying me during that hike was Pak Edi, a porter at the time, who now works full time at the Rangkong research camp. We sat to rest our legs before the last section of the walk, and observed the three apes – a mother and juvenile, and another adult – as they foraged on the outskirts of protected land. It was rare to see an orangutan this far out from the primary rainforest and this close to the human settlement, let alone three! I became tearful on the final section of the hike out, reflecting on the life-changing year that I had and all the things that I would miss. I remember calling Dr. Knott once I reached the researcher house in the town of Ketapang to update her, and I told her about the orangutans that I saw at the dam. I told her I thought it was their way of saying goodbye to me. Instead, Dr. Knott told me that she thought it was a sign that I would be back again...



Natalie crossing the research camp suspension bridge (top) and following an orangutan (bottom) in 2019.

Shortly after returning to the U.S., the COVID-19 pandemic began, and I transitioned from working part-time on social media and donor management for GPOCP/YP, to working full time as Program Coordinator in the summer of 2020. I built up my repertoire of skills, learning more about the conservation program within GPOCP/YP, so I could continue to expand my responsibilities. I worked to oversee both the research and conservation programs, and served as the liaison between the Indonesia and Boston offices as everyone got used to working from home, adjusting as needed to keep our program running at full capacity. I learned to write and report on grants, manage donor relations, train research managers and assistants, ensure appropriate field data collection, conduct financial management and budgeting, create newsletters, maintain websites, and more. It was rewarding to shift my focus from field methods to understanding the conservation- and management-side of operations.

After anxiously awaiting travel restrictions to loosen so I could get back to this special place, I was able to return to West Kalimantan for two months in the summer of 2022, and then again in January-February of this year. It was wonderful to reconnect with old friends, strengthen working relationships, and meet new people who also care about understanding and saving wild orangutans.



Top: Natalie and Rizal, the current Research Manager, at camp in 2019.

Bottom: In front of the new main research building at camp in 2022.

Throughout the time I've spent in Indonesia, I witnessed the welcoming of four new infant orangutans, attended three weddings, spent two of my birthdays in the rainforest, and learned one new language. I was also embraced by a warm community of lifelong friends. During my time with GPOCP/YP I've also seen many changes – COVID forced some necessary changes in structure and staffing, we welcomed new staff and said sad goodbye to others, we rebuilt the research station, we moved offices. While changes will continue to occur, I take comfort in knowing that this program existed way before me and, thanks to the incredibly dedicated staff, will continue way beyond me.

Although it is very sad to leave GPOCP/YP, I know that this is more of a *sampai jumpa nanti* (see you later) than a *selamat tinggal* (goodbye). For my dissertation research I intend to conduct a comparative study between orangutans living at the Tuanan Research Station in Central Kalimantan, and those living in Gunung Palung. I can't wait to return to Gunung Palung once the time comes.

I am incredibly grateful for the experiences – both personal and professional – I have gained throughout my work with the orangutans (and people) of Gunung Palung National Park. These experiences have enriched me with skills that I know will help me to succeed in my future as I pursue my PhD, and beyond. GPOCP/YP has helped fortify me with a wide range of skills and allowed me to develop a cultural and linguistic competency to collaborate with people of different ages, nationalities, and backgrounds. I am excited and humbled to see where this next stage of my career takes me.



Keluarga Besar (big family) - the team at the 2023 GPOCP/YP Annual Meeting

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.

"Anything else you're interested in is not going to happen if you can't breathe the air and drink the water. Don't sit this one out. Do something. You are by accident of fate alive at an absolutely critical moment in the history of our planet."

-Carl Sagan



Our Contact Information

Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation
Program

P.O. Box G

[1661 Massachusetts Ave](#)

[Lexington, MA 02420](#)

1-617-353-7723

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

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Yayasan Palung

Jl. Kol. Sugiono, no. 28, RT 013/RW 05 Sampit,

Kec. Delta Pawan, Kabupaten Ketapang,

Kalimantan Barat 78811, Indonesia

www.yayasanpalung.com



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