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## GPOCP: December 2023 - A year-end field trip and a visit from Prof. Tatang Mitra Setia

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Dear Friends and Supporters,

I hope the holiday season has been one of warmth and happiness for you all. As 2023 comes to a close, we are so thankful for your support and all that we have been able to accomplish this year. Our new Rangkong Research Station has led to new observations and a deeper understanding of how wild orangutans respond to human-altered ecosystems, our thermal drone surveys are actively finding orangutans, and our bioacoustic and camera trap monitoring are in full swing. We have protected more forest area outside of the national park, aided communities in securing their rights to their traditional lands, reached thousands of people from small children to adults with environmental education and conservation awareness, involved more people in livelihoods that are sustainable and economically viable, and prevented

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illegal activities like logging, hunting, and keeping wild animals as pets. Thank you all for joining us on this journey, and we look forward to sharing more with you in 2024!

For this month's *Code RED* newsletter, you will hear from Riduwan, our Environmental Education Field Officer, about an exciting field trip with a group of high school students to visit Lubuk Baji in Gunung Palung National Park. This was a great way to wrap up 2023 for our education team, leaving local young people excited and motivated to be the next conservation leaders in their region.

We are also excited to have a guest article by Professor Tatang Mitra Setia from Universitas Nasional in Jakarta. Professor Tatang is one of the most prominent Indonesian orangutan researchers and we are honored to collaborate with him and the UNAS team. Read about his epic journey upriver and his delight with the incredible natural beauty of the park.

Wishing you all a very happy and healthy 2024!



Cheryl Knott, PhD  
Executive Director

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

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The beautiful fruit collages made by our Assistant Research Manager, Sumihadi, that were featured in last month's [Code Red](#), are now available as a 2024 calendar! You can get yours by making a \$25 donation [here](#) and typing *Calendar* in the comment box along with your mailing address. Available while supplies last.

## Exploring Biodiversity and Meeting an Orangutan on a Rainforest Field Trip

*By Riduwan, Environmental Education Field Officer*

Yayasan Palung/GPOCP hosts a variety of field trip activities in the Gunung Palung National Park area and one of our favorite locations for this is the Lubuk Baji Environmental Education camp. This beautiful camp site and structure were built by Yayasan Palung/GPOCP in 2005 as an overnight environmental field trip destination where students could learn about the region's biodiversity through an immersive experience. The facility, located in the Sukadana Hills section of Gunung Palung National Park, is now managed by the National Park and can be visited by the general public, including students.

At the end of 2023, from December 6 to December 8, 2023, we held a field trip for high school students from SMA Negeri 3 Simpang Hilir District, accompanied by Yayasan Palung/GPOCP staff and Bentangor Volunteers for Conservation (REBONK). This high school in Simpang Hilir District is located in a village where Yayasan Palung also supports their Village Forest (*hutan desa*) program. Fieldtrip activities in Lubuk Baji have been included in the Cooperation Agreement (PKS) between the Gunung Palung National Park Office and Yayasan Palung/GPOCP.



*The field trip participants in front of Lubuk Baji camp.*

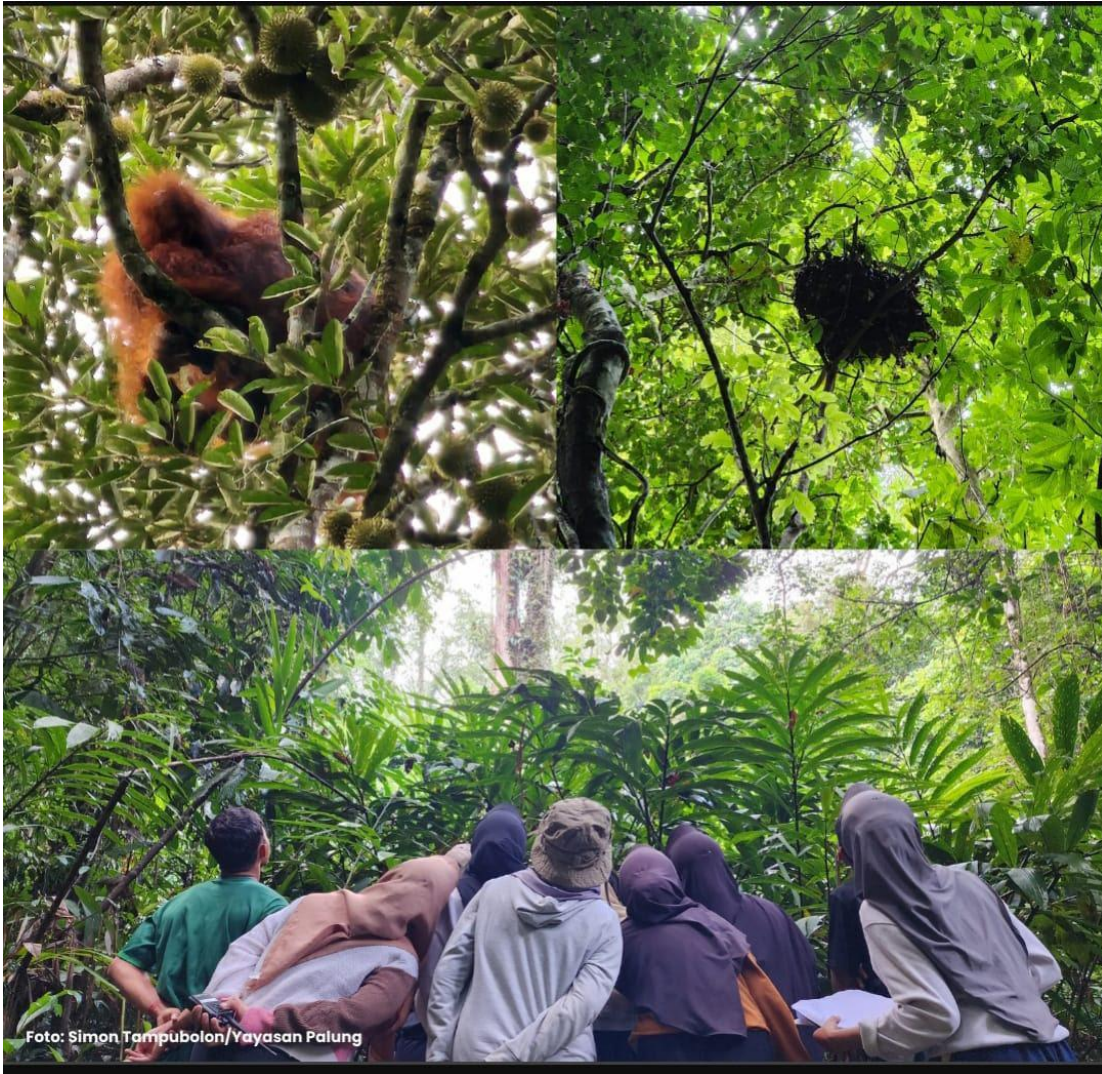
This 3-day field trip was a great way to end the students' semester for 2023, with Yayasan Palung/GPOCP offering instruction and running activities. A total of 15 students accompanied by 1 teacher came on the field trip. In addition to enjoying the natural beauty of Gunung Palung National Park and Lubuk Baji, students also had educational experiences including a nocturnal animal observation activity led by REBONK Volunteers, a forest survey and plant morphology lesson delivered by the author (Riduawan), and biodiversity lessons. Students gained insights into the environment in their own backyard and even explored lunar cycles through a lesson delivered by our Environmental Education Coordinator for Kayong Utara Regency, Simon Tampubolon.



*High school students make observations of forest animals and vegetation.*

There was a very special and rare moment during this field trip where the group got to encounter orangutans directly! Since orangutans are semi-solitary and fairly shy, this does not happen often on

our field trips. The group saw an orangutan male who had large cheekpads (a flanged male) and was eating durian fruit right behind the Lubuk Baji camp. The students were thrilled to finally meet orangutans directly. One day earlier during a discussion between students and Yayasan Palung staff, students were asked about the purpose of a field trip such as the one they were on. A student named Chelsea answered first – she wanted to see the beauty of Gunung Palung and especially to see orangutans directly because, as she explained, orangutans are rare animals and are difficult to meet. Her wish was granted and Chelsea, along with the other students, got to observe a male orangutan.



*Field trip participants gather to get a good look (bottom) at an orangutan (top left) we encountered. We also saw orangutan nests in the canopy (top right), more evidence that orangutans regularly use this habitat.*

During animal watching activities the students encountered monkeys, turtles, several species of frogs, flying lizards, chameleons and insects. They also saw the nest of an orangutan and learned about how researchers classify nests by position in the tree, construction elements, and age. The students were invited to discuss their ideas and thoughts about orangutans and the environment.



*Student sharing their observations from their exploration and practice of field techniques in the forest.*

For me as a leader on this trip, this was my second time encountering an orangutan in Lubuk Baji. The first experience was during a field trip with students from Ketapang in 2021. The encounter happened on the way home. We saw an orangutan female with her offspring climbing a tree. Lubuk Baji thus provides an important refuge where orangutans can play, climb, sleep, and look for food. Together, we need to protect this area and preserve all of Gunung Palung National Park for orangutans and the other creatures that live there.



*Group photo of the field trip participants from the scenic overlook at the top of the mountain.*

## A Memorable Visit to the Cabang Panti Research Station and the Rangkong River Camp

*By Dr. Tatang Mitra Setia, Professor of Biology at Universitas Nasional*

On December 8-12, the Universitas Nasional team represented by me (Tatang Mitra Setia) and Astri Zulfa had the opportunity to visit the Cabang Panti Research Station and Rangkong Camp, where UNAS, in collaboration with Boston University, has an orangutan research program. The purpose of our visit was to monitor the development of research activities, and to gather information about research topics that can be investigated in the future. In addition, we also discussed the potential for cooperative activities that can be carried out with other programs at Yayasan Palung/GPOCP, with whom we also have an MoU.

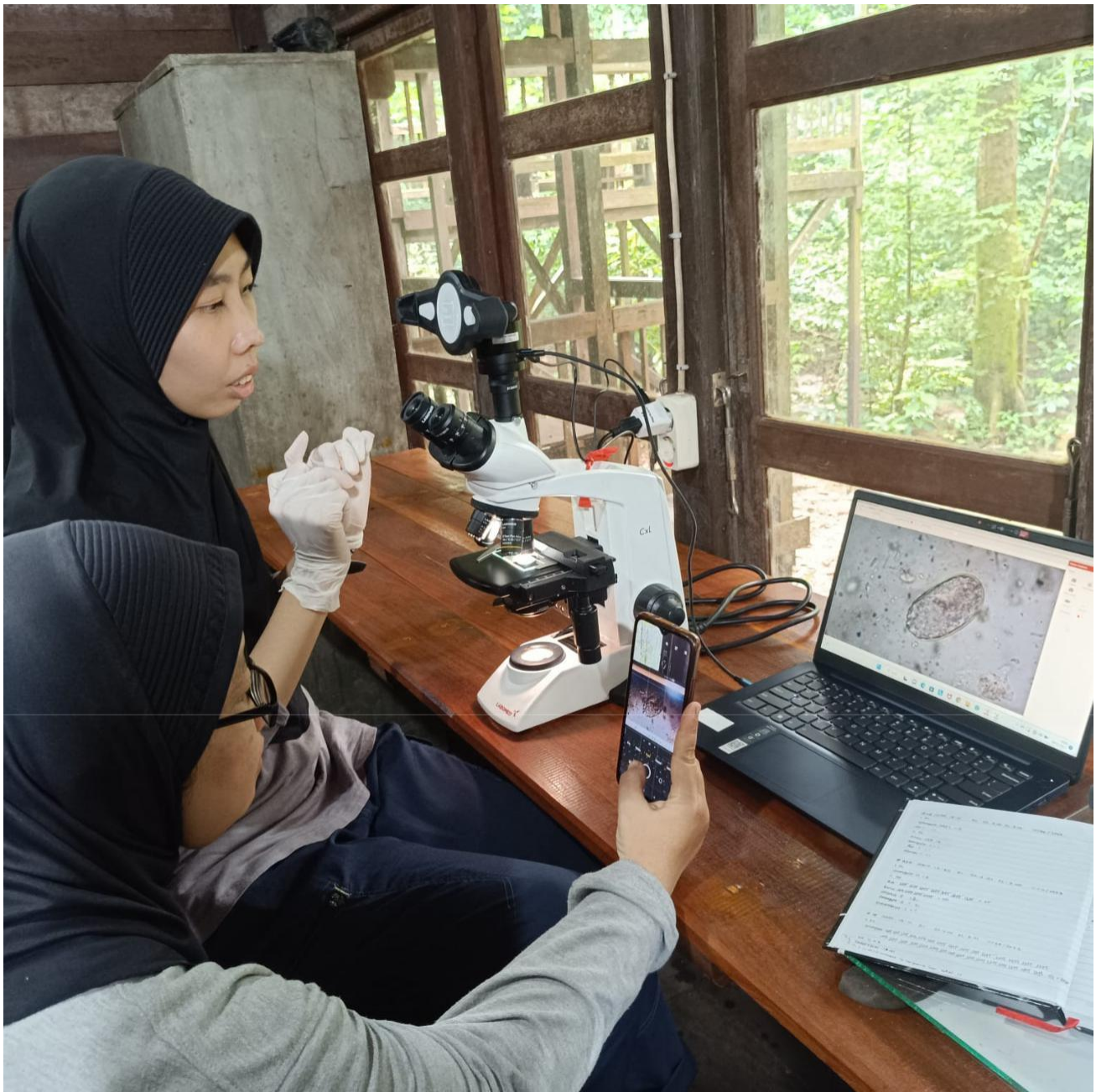
On Friday, December 8 we began the journey to the Cabang Panti Research Station by boat up the river from Semanjak, Benawai Agung Village. This trip was beyond our expectation and quite unusual because it took 14 hours! The engine of the boat we were using broke down while in the middle of the trip (Lubuk Kuwali) and we could not continue. Eventually we were able to find land and get a phone signal so that we could contact staff from the Cabang Panti Research Station to provide assistance. We waited by the river until 10 pm when Rizal (the research manager), and 2 research assistants arrived with 1 more boat from the camp. After the engine was repaired, we were able to resume the journey in the middle of the night. Finally, we arrived at the Cabang Panti Research Station at 4:30 am, just as the field assistants were heading out to the orangutan nest. It was quite a tiring journey for us!



*Trip upriver to Cabang Panti, when the engine was damaged and we waited for the boat from camp to*

*pick us up (Pak Tatang is on the right).*

Even after this long journey, our fatigue was erased upon seeing the beauty of the forest and the unique biodiversity in the area of the Cabang Panti Research Station. The first day at the camp (9 Dec), we did not enter the forest because we needed some rest. However, we continued to explore the forest near the research camp building. In the morning, we heard the call of the gibbon, *Hylobates albibarbis*, not far from camp. Their beautiful songs are exchanged between groups and with each other. Then we saw a school of fish swimming back and forth in the river in front of the camp. Later we observed research activities carried out in the camp, such as the fruit analysis process carried out by Sumihadi and parasite examination by Ishma Fatiha.



*Ishma shows Ibu Astri how to check for parasites in orangutan feces.*

On the second day (10 Dec), our activity began by seeing the process of searching for orangutans using thermal drones, conducted by Wahyu Susanto. This new method of searching for orangutans is very interesting because it can make it easier for researchers to search for orangutans from the air, in addition to continuing to search in the typical fashion by following transect lines. Then, we went to see

the orangutan already being followed by the field assistants. We met orangutans on the 'ES' transect and saw that there were 3 orangutans who were having a "party", namely Tunjuk, a male orangutan, and a female orangutan, Bibi, and her son Bayas, eating in a tree. We followed the orangutans for several hours and observed their different feeding techniques as they ate fruit, bark and termites and moved from one feeding tree to another.



*The orangutan party (Tunjuk, Bibi and Bayas) show their bark feeding techniques.*

The third day (11 Dec), we traveled through the forest path to the Rangkong Research Station – the new satellite camp that is closer to the border of the National Park. We were accompanied on our journey there by Mas Endro Setiawan, Head of the Cabang Panti Research Station, Gunung Palung National Park Office and Wahyu Susanto, the Director of the Research Program of Yayasan Palung, and Rizal, the Cabang Panti Research Manager. Even though we studied Biology at UNAS as students more than 30 years ago, there are still many new things to see, and new lessons to learn. When we were discussing research topics that could be developed in the future, suddenly Mas Endro, who is also a botanist, said, "What is the difference between single leaves and compound leaves?" Those of us who had also received lessons in plant morphology in college, were hesitant to answer. Then Mas Endro gave an explanation and showed us examples of single and compound leaves, and we gained a deeper understanding.

The journey to the Rangkong camp is about 7 km through the Rangkong research trails that have just been completed. On the same path, we passed through 2 different types of forests, namely alluvial and heath. When we were in the heath forest, we saw several pitcher plants and one of them was *Nepenthes bicalcarata* which, according to Mas Endro, is an endemic plant of Kalimantan (i.e. it is only found in Borneo). The pitcher bag has a unique characteristic, namely the presence of fangs (like vampires) in the sac. After 4 hours of travel, we finally arrived at the Rangkong camp and met Sabta (the Rangkong Coordinator) and the research assistants who had just returned from looking for orangutans.







Group photo in front of the Rangkong (Hornbill) Camp and a *Nepenthes bicalcarta* pitcher plant.

On the 4th day (12 Dec), our last day at Cabang Panti, we returned to Ketapang using the same boat as when we arrived. But our way down river was very smooth and only took 4 hours until our arrival in Semanjak village. In the evening, we held a meeting with Mr. Edi Rahman, the Director of Yayasan Palung. During the meeting, Mr. Edi and the Conservation Managers gave presentations about the activities that have been carried out by Yayasan Palung. We also discussed potential cooperative activities that can be done together in the future. Then we continued the discussions over dinner together.





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