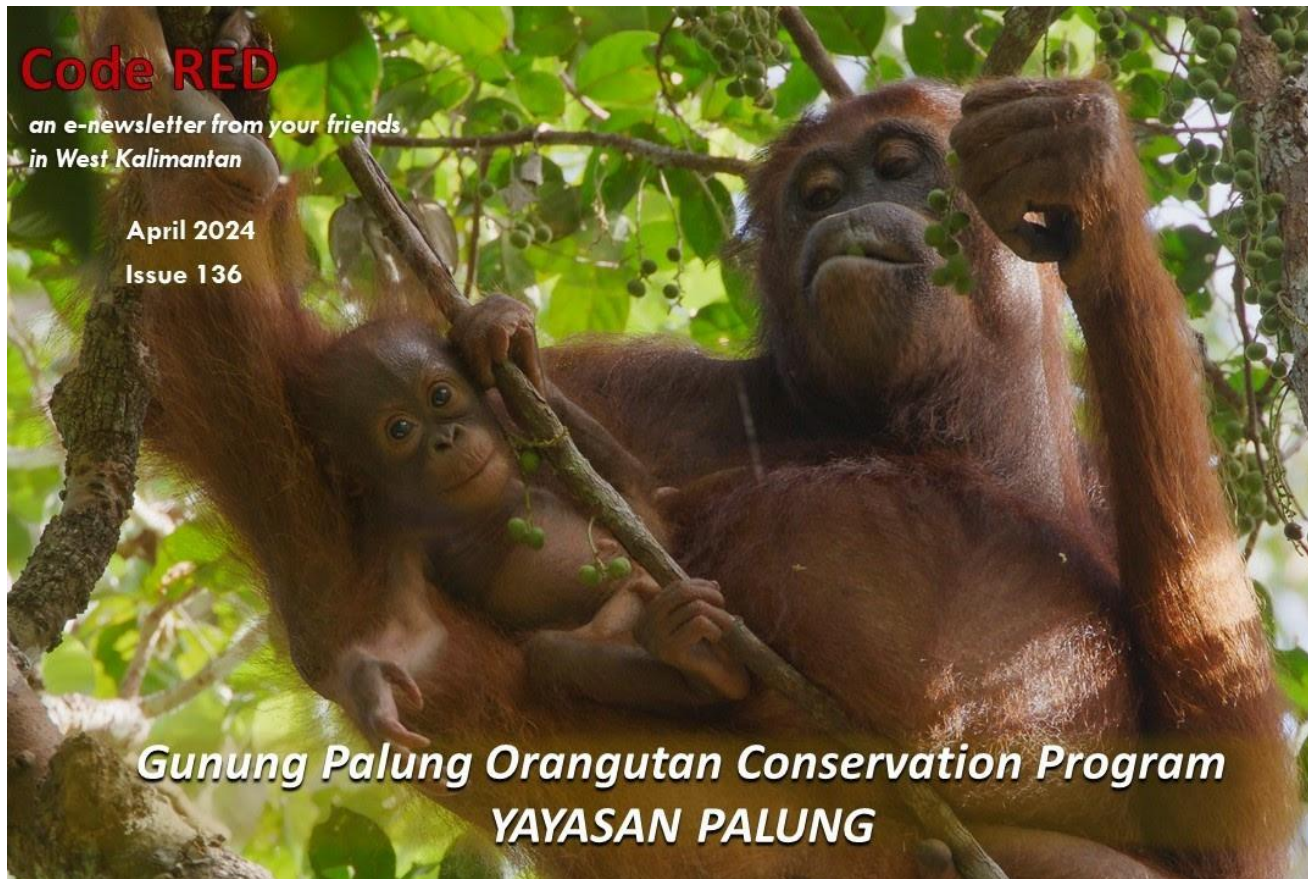

GPOCP: April 2024 - A Threat to Village Forests & Farewell to Assistant Research Manager



Dear Friends and Supporters,

A piece of exciting news from the research station - one of our most commonly encountered orangutans at the field site over the last decade+, Bibi, is pregnant! This will be Bibi's third baby, after her adolescent son Bayas and her adult daughter, Berani. We love being able to document the long reproductive lives of orangutans, and look forward to giving updates about Bibi in the coming months.

In this issue of *Code RED*, we hear from our Field Director, Edi Rahman, about an issue that has been ongoing just to the North of the area where we work. There has been rapid deforestation creeping ever closer to some of the village forests that we assist, but national and international attention

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on the matter brings the hope that the destruction may come to a halt.

You will also hear from Sumihadi, our Assistant Research Manager, who you may remember from her beautiful orangutan fruit collages featured in our November newsletter. Sumi is stepping down from her position as she enters a new phase of her life and embarks on the journey of motherhood. We are so grateful to Sumi for her hard work as a valued member of our research team, and while we will miss her greatly, we are wishing her all the best and look forward to updates from her!

My best wishes to you all for a happy and healthy May!



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



Exciting news to round out the semester - Dr. Cheryl Knott, has been named Boston University **Arts and Sciences Distinguished Professor**! This distinction is in recognition of her outstanding scholarship, teaching, and service to the College of Arts and Sciences at BU and we are so proud to celebrate this with her! Cheryl commented, "I am honored and humbled to have received the new title of "Arts and Sciences Distinguished Professor" at Boston University. The award was given in large part for my research and conservation work on wild orangutans. I am grateful to all the students, staff and colleagues who have supported me and our joint research and conservation endeavors over the past 30 years."

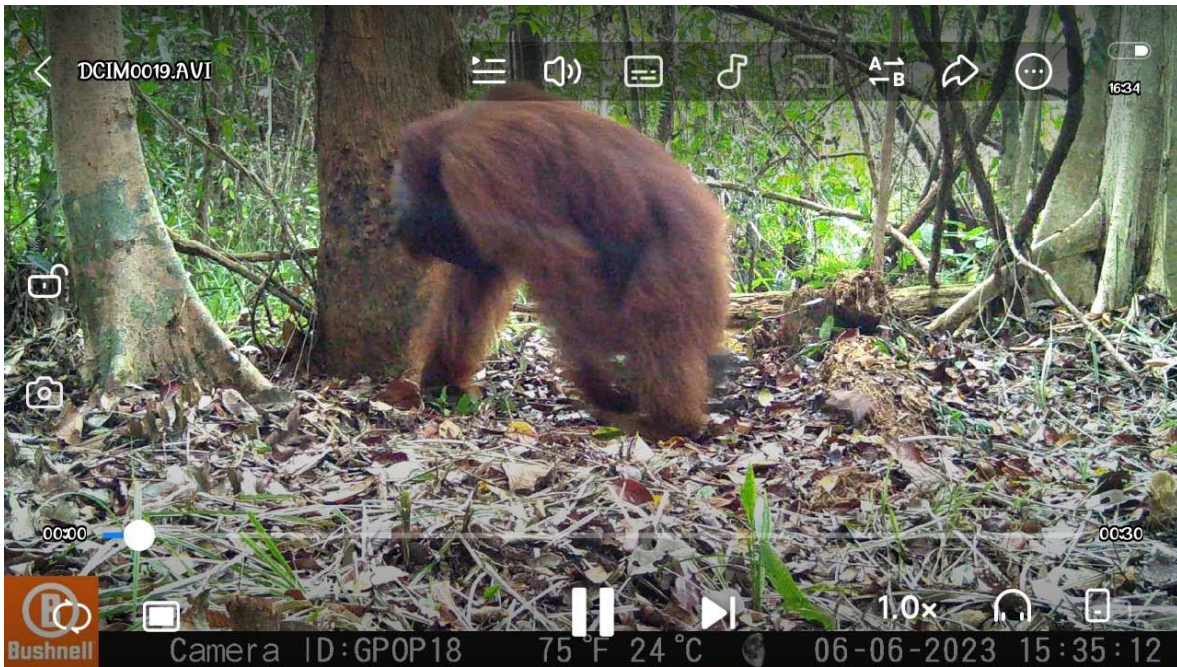
**Join Save Wild
Orangutans**

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A Threat to Village Forests

By Edi Rahman, Field Director

In Simpang Hilir District, there is a Peat Protection Forest (HLG), Sungai Paduan, covering an area of 6,788 hectares which is currently designated as Village Forest for 4 villages - Padu Banjar Village, Pulau Kumbang Village, Pemangkat Village and Nipah Kuning Village. The area is a peat swamp forest which is a comfortable place for many animals to live, especially orangutans, gibbons, red leaf monkeys, sun bears, clouded leopards, proboscis monkeys, various bird species, and other animals. The Village Forest Management Boards (LPHD) have collaborated with Yayasan Palung to manage and utilize this forest area since 2014. The forest wildlife are monitored regularly by the LPHD, working with Yayasan Palung, through biodiversity survey activities, patrols, and passive monitoring (camera traps, bioacoustic recorders).



An orangutan photographed by a camera trap in a village forest adjacent to the PT Mayawana Persada concession. Orangutans have very large home ranges, so they would certainly require forest beyond the Village Forest area in the corporation's concession.

The Sungai Paduan Village Forest area is directly adjacent to one of the Industrial Plantation Forest concessions of the corporation, PT. Mayawana Persada, whose area contains the same forest type as Sungai Paduan, which some refer to as the Mendawak landscape. During a biodiversity survey of the village forest area, Yayasan Palung and the LPHD could hear the long calls of orangutans coming from the direction of the concession and several orangutan nests were observed. Hornbills and other animals were also seen on the PT. Mayawana Persada land. Thus, it is very unfortunate that when the Padu Banjar and Nipah Kuning Village forest patrol teams were patrolling in early March 2024 in the village forest area directly adjacent to PT. Mayawana Persada, they observed the company carrying out land clearing activities in areas indicated as habitat for various species of protected animals, including orangutans.



Machinery clearing forest just outside the village forest area.

Since Mayawana Persada's land clearing is largely in an area directly adjacent to 4 village forests, it will cut off corridors that animals use to travel between village forests and larger forest areas. It will impact the population density of orangutans in the village forest area, driving individuals into much smaller remaining forest. Other threats to the village forests will increase – greater exposure and access by humans leads to increased risk of poaching, illegal logging, and fires. In addition, the threat of orangutan-human conflict will also be higher, especially in the village communities directly adjacent to the concession.

In October of 2022, a Circular Letter was issued by the Directorate General of Sustainable Forest Management, addressed to the Leaders of Forest Utilization Business Permits (PBPH) throughout Indonesia to pay attention to and implement the protection of protected wildlife and included the following: (a) That elephants, tigers, orangutans and other protected wildlife in the concession area are state assets so it is the obligation of Forest Utilization Business Permit (PBPH) holders to protect and preserve them. (b) For protected areas located in concession areas, it is necessary to inventory and verify the condition of the habitat for elephants, tigers, orangutans and protected wildlife, especially to determine the availability of conservation areas within areas with the designation of Wildlife Protection Area. This is the obligation of permit holders seeking forest utilization. (c) Foster development of protected wildlife habitat by providing feed plants in PBPH and other areas. There are sanctions indicated in the Circular Letter for PBPH holders who do not follow these directives. However, PT Mayawan Persada has carried out land clearing in an area that has every indication of being suitable habitat for protected wildlife, and there are orangutans there.



Active forest clearing just outside the village forest area.

At the end of 2023 and in early 2024, there was a sharp spotlight put on PT. Mayawana Persada by conservation activists, both individuals and institutions and national and international media (see one such news article [here](#)), leading the company to cease land clearing activities, especially in peat swamp forest areas which are designated as protected animal habitats. This encouraging result was followed up by the issuance of a Letter from the Directorate General of Sustainable Forest Management of the Ministry of Environment and Forestry on March 28, 2024 addressed to the President Director of PBPH-HT PT Mayawana Persada in Jakarta/Pontianak Regarding the Termination of Logged Over Area (LOA) Logging Activities. In the letter it is stated that in consideration of achieving Indonesia's FOLU Net Sink 2030 target, PT Mayawana Persada must stop all logging activities in the logged over area (LOA) and focus on activities such as land rehabilitation and other environmental restoration activities.



Land clearing by PT Mayawana Persada near the village forest area.

This recent letter addressed to PT. Mayawana Persada is a very promising development in ceasing the environmental damage that has been done in the area recently, but now, it is necessary to make sure that PT. Mayawana Persada obeys and follows through on the directives. Supervision must be carried out by all parties, both the government (central, provincial, district), conservation institutions and activists as well as communities around PT. Mayawana Persada.



Land clearing by Mayawana Persada in the Mendawak Landscape.

A Bittersweet Farewell

By Sumihadi, Assistant Research Manager

I recall the saying, "Experience is the best teacher." I quite agree with that statement, because I have learned that my own experiences have shaped the flow of my life.

For four years I have been part of the Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Project-Yayasan Palung (GPOCP-YP) family as a member of the research team. It was a long journey to become part of this team, and I am reflecting now on all of the experiences that led me to where I am today. I have loved my job, but am giving it up for another love that is no less valuable for my life.



Sumihadi, enjoying an orangutan follow.

I first became involved with YP in 2013 when I applied for a West Bornean Orangutan Caring Scholarship to attend university. I was honored to become one of the scholarship recipients in the 2014 academic year. As part of this YP sponsored scholarship program, in 2017 myself and five other students did a college internship for 1 month at the Cabang Panti Research Station (SRCP). We took part in all the orangutan research project activities managed by YP, and from this internship, the best experiences of my life would emerge. I learned quite a lot about the research project in a very short time.

Then, in 2018, I returned to SRCP to collect data for my thesis on *Ficus* spp. (figs). I continued to learn how to be a researcher in the wilderness here, preparing a study, collecting data for the orangutan project, and managing my own project data. In December 2019, I graduated from college and was offered a one-month internship at SRCP, which was followed by an official offer to join the research team in 2020 as a laboratory assistant. At first, I doubted whether I could live and work in the forest but decided to push all doubts aside and go for it.



Documenting the fruit eaten by orangutans in one month.

Before I finished the training period in my new role, the world was shocked by the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Several project research staff from abroad were forced to return to their respective countries due to the policies of world governments in response to the pandemic. The orangutan project continued to try to survive with the altered pandemic conditions and I also persevered in learning all the research protocols despite the limitations the pandemic imposed on us.

My job as a laboratory assistant involved working with orangutan biological samples and field data and then helping to manage data from orangutan behavioral follows. I processed fecal and urine samples and orangutan food samples. I also helped to conduct an inventory of all the foods eaten by orangutans in Gunung Palung and contributed to a digital herbarium to document the foods of the

Bornean orangutan. This botanical work really grew as a main interest of mine, and I loved creating this digital herbarium to help identify orangutan foods in Kalimantan.

Time seemed to fly by as I was enjoying my role so much, and in 2023 I accepted new responsibilities as Assistant Research Manager. Much of my work was the same as before, but my responsibilities for the botanical data and documenting orangutan foods grew. Orangutans are frugivorous animals that prefer to eat fruit, but they also eat tree bark, young leaves, old leaves, flowers, grass and insects. Learning about the diet of orangutans helped me to learn so much about the forest as a whole.



The research team at the Annual Meeting in January 2024.

Now, in April 2024, my time with YP is coming to an end, and I am leaving the Cabang Panti Research Station. I feel very sad to say goodbye to this beautiful experience in the most beautiful place. I hope that Yayasan Palung and all my incredible friends will continue to be successful. I leave it behind now to spend precious time with my first baby – due to arrive very soon. I hope that the forest will be preserved and the animals will be protected for my own little future conservationist.



Sumi, sharing one last fruit collage.

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.

"It is not so much for its beauty that the forest makes a claim upon men's hearts, as for that subtle something, that quality of air that emanation from old trees, that so wonderfully changes and renews a weary spirit."

- Robert Louis Stevenson



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