



Forest Chatter



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From the President ...

In June, when I wrote my last President's Report, I was hoping that today, three months later, we would be on a better track. I was hoping we could return to a new normal, start releasing orangutans again and reopen our centres for visitors.

Instead, we are still fighting the virus. While luckily, at the time of writing, no staff members or orangutans have contracted COVID-19, we remain extremely vigilant. New challenges continue to arise as we tirelessly proceed with our life-saving work amid the global pandemic. The financial strains are high, and the fear that humans might transmit the virus to orangutans guides our decision

making every day. Whilst the possibility is low we have to ensure we don't release a COVID-19 ticking time bomb into the rainforest.

Fortunately, we don't have to face these unprecedented times alone. We are incredibly grateful to have you by our side, fighting with us to keep our amazingly beautiful red cousins safe. Thanks to your continuous support, our recent matched donation initiative with EthicalJobs.com.au was a great success (see below).

On the following pages, we like to take you with us into the rainforest. There you will learn about the importance of snapshots for science; find out why orangutans matter

for the survival of us all; and meet cheeky Marlon, his best pal Koprak and our awarded technician Mang. Relax, enjoy and be inspired!

Tony Gilding, President



You doubled the impact

Thanks to your generous gifts, our matched donations initiative was a great success. Our friends at EthicalJobs.com.au doubled the amount raised to a total of \$60,520. We did not just reach our goal; we exceeded it.

This financial boost helps us tremendously in overcoming the considerable funding shortfall we are experiencing during these uncertain times. Continuing our orangutan

conservation work while under financial strain has not been easy over the past months.

With our two orangutan rehabilitation centres being closed to visitors, and all our offline fundraising activities and volunteer efforts on halt, we have lost a vital form of support. At the same time, prices for food and other essential items, like masks, disinfectants and medications, are climbing.

Did you know that orangutans spend most of their time feeding? Our 400 staff members provide the almost 500 orangutans in our care about 80,000 kilograms of fruits and vegetables and 1,250 litres of milk per month. Being committed to providing the best care possible for our red cousins, our main focus at this time is to secure the standard food supply, so we can continue

to provide fresh fruits, vegetables and other products that are vital in keeping our orangutans healthy.

However, we also have to be vigilant for potential fire threats during this current dry season. Luckily, due to milder weather, experts predict a less severe forest fire season across Indonesia this year compared to the devastating one last year. But they also warn that the need to focus on fighting the pandemic is hindering fire prevention and law enforcement, with less time and financial resources for fire and haze response.

Whatever the challenges we are facing, we are only as strong as the people who support us. No act of kindness is too small. When we save orangutans, we also save the forests and the vast biodiversity found within them, and consequently: all of us (see page 3).





The social butterfly from island 3

Little Marlon is like a shadow. Following Koprak, this impressive male orangutan, around the island. He even repeatedly climbs on his back, trying to pull Koprak down on the forest floor – and the strong male, more than twice Marlon's size, lets him succeed.

This is the encouraging story of Marlon, his armless buddy Koprak, and their life on one of our pre-release islands. Despite totally different childhoods, both have such an inspiring, friendly personality, that it is no surprise they became besties.

Marlon is not the typical 4-year-old orangutan who mostly hangs out with his mother. He is an explorer, cheeky and outgoing, with that special twinkle in his eyes, as if he is asking: "So, what's up next?"



Born in November 2015 on our pre-release island 3 at the Samboja Lestari Rehabilitation Centre in East Kalimantan, Marlon has known freedom his entire life. Pre-release islands are human-made islands, surrounded by water (orangutans can't swim), where our forest school graduates can put their learned skills to the test. The islands are like a 'forest university', before the final graduation to a life in the wild. In addition, they also serve as sanctuary islands for orangutans we can't release to the wild.

Compared to Marlon, his mum Merin had a tough start into life. She was separated from her mother as a baby and trained to perform in a circus before she was rescued and brought to Samboja Lestari. Here she successfully completed all levels of forest school, advanced to the pre-release stage of rehabilitation – and became pregnant with Marlon.

Initially, Marlon and Merin shared the island with another female, Aluhdora. Confident little Marlon frequently spent time with her, and sometimes they even slept together in the same nest. But then Aluhdora was transferred to a different island and Koprak and his long-time friend, Lesley, arrived.

Electrocuted on the run

14-year-old Koprak's story is as impressive as his appearance. He came to Samboja Lestari with both arms badly injured. He had climbed a telephone pole while escaping his captors and got electrocuted. Our medical team had to amputate his arms to save his life. But Koprak didn't

give up. He has mastered the ability to climb trees and forage for natural food using only his legs. Even though we can never release him to the wild, we are confident that he will thrive on his new, semi-wild island home.

Surprisingly, a few days after Koprak and Lesley arrived on pre-release island 3, little Marlon became increasingly difficult to spot. Our technicians speculated that Merin was perhaps spending more time with her son deep in the forest due to the new presence of a dominant male.

However, it didn't take long until Marlon's curiosity gained the upper hand again. He seemed fascinated by Koprak, who showed no signs of hostility towards Marlon's frequent glances. The technicians even noticed times when Marlon would be playing alone and Koprak would approach him, rolling down his body. At first, Marlon appeared to avoid him, but as time passed and their relationship formed, Marlon began to interact more and more with the 14-year-old male.

Marlon and Koprak have since become great pals, and now like to wrestle and play friendly biting games. They have even been seen building nests together. Sometimes Lesley joins in, while Merin stays away from Koprak, but still keeps a close eye on Marlon, as she monitors from afar. When she sees that her son is growing tired, she quickly approaches to breastfeed him. Merin has clearly raised an inquisitive and social, but cautious male orangutan in Marlon - the perfect combination for a future survival in the wild.

Snaps from traps

Our team in the Bukit Batikap Protection Forest embarked on a new collaborative research project using camera traps to monitor our released orangutans – with promising results.

Since 2012, we have released 183 orangutans into the Bukit Batikap Protection Forest. To monitor their adaptation in their new environment, we use radio tracking devices that pick up signals of small radio transmitters implanted under the skin of each reintroduced orangutan. This method provides us with a huge amount of behavioural data.

However, the battery life of most tracking implants has expired, and we need to look at alternative research tools to monitor the population. In a pilot study, working with the University of British Columbia (UBC), Canada, and the Bogor Agricultural University (Institut Pertanian Bogor) in Indonesia, we set up camera traps to see if these might serve as a cost-effective, non-invasive method to aid our post-release monitoring efforts.

It is the first time we have used camera traps in our reintroduction sites, and we don't know yet if they will be able to help answer our questions. But we know that non-invasive tools are critical to limit potential contact between orangutans

and humans and therefore reduce the risk of transmitting diseases.

Early results from the pilot study looked promising, so recently a joint team from BOS Foundation and UBC deployed another 30 camera traps in Batikap. Our goal is to gather data about how the orangutans have arranged themselves throughout the forest, the current population density and the individual longer-term survival success. Much depends on the cameras recording sufficient data, and on the orangutans' (and other animals') cooperation in terms of leaving the cameras undisturbed. Particularly reintroduced rehabilitated orangutans can be very curious and keen to check out anything new.

Although we are still in the early phase of the project, we have had great success in capturing images of some of the orangutans, and also a plethora of other species including sun bears, clouded leopard, leopard cat, marbled cat, macaques, white-fronted langurs, bearded pigs, muntjacs, pangolins and many more. It is very impressive to see the vast elusive wildlife which inhabits Batikap. We will continue to periodically check the cameras, retrieve data and change SD cards and batteries - and we will keep you updated on any exciting findings.



Why orangutans matter

Orangutans are vital to the survival of the rainforests. And rainforests are critical to the survival of all other living creatures on earth. They provide clean water and fresh air, absorb carbon dioxide, help regulate the climate, and are home to millions of species.

Indonesia's rainforests are some of the oldest in the world. They are

housing not only the last remaining orangutans but also Sumatran rhinos, Asian elephants and clouded leopards. Just a single tree can be home to thousands of animals – from the tiniest in the leaf litter to the largest in the canopy. But in order to survive, many trees and plants rely on other species to spread their seeds. Here is where orangutans come in. They are a keystone or umbrella species, also known as 'the gardeners of the forest'.

While travelling through the jungle foraging for fruits, orangutans help spread seeds over a wide area, with males having a larger home range than females. Researchers who investigated orangutans seed dispersal, found seeds in 73 per cent of orangutans' faeces, with 828 of

them in just one sample. Their size varied from a few millimetres to two and a half centimetres. The larger seeds, in particular, can only be digested by orangutans because they are too big for smaller forest animals.

The study also revealed that for four out of five tree species the scientists looked at, seeds that were spat out or defecated by orangutans showed either germination success and/or quicker germination, compared with the ones that had not been spat out or digested by orangutans (Tarsisz et al., Biological Journal of the Linnean Society, January 2018).

The findings confirm how crucial our red cousins are for maintaining a healthy forest ecosystem. Let's work together to save orangutans, rainforests and all diversity within!



HELLO, I AM MANG USUP



Muhammad Usup, known as Mang Usup, is working for the Post Release Monitoring (PRM) team at our Kehje Sewen Forest in East Kalimantan. He recently received the 'best technician' award by BOS Foundation's company RHOI.

How long have you been working for the BOS Foundation?

Since 2012. I undertook training in observation methods and ethology, which is the study of animal behaviour, at the Ragunan Zoo, in Jakarta. Then I went directly to the Kehje Sewen Forest to begin working as a member of the Post-Release-Monitoring team there. I believe that this job is my true calling.

What is your responsibility as a member of the PRM team?

We monitor the progress of released orangutans in the forest, conduct

phenology surveys and forest patrols, carry out camp maintenance, and support the release of new orangutans from the rehabilitation centres.

Do you have a most memorable experience while being on patrol?

I have so many. For example, one time, we bumped into Mona. She was released in 2013 and is unafraid of humans. She was obviously not happy with us being so close, so we stepped back to give her space. But one of my colleagues was not quick enough, and Mona grabbed him by the leg. We quickly distracted her, and she luckily released him. That particular moment taught me that we should never underestimate rehabilitated orangutans who had traumatic experiences with humans in the past. No matter how long they have known humans, they are just

like any other wild animal fighting to survive.

What do you love most about orangutans?

The way that orangutan mothers care for their babies touches me deeply. They act pretty much like a human mother with her child. It is so interesting to observe them in their natural habitat.

Can you tell us your hopes for the future?

I hope that BOS will achieve even greater success and that the PRM teams continue to receive the support they need to provide vital data and reports from the forest. I also sincerely wish that the released orangutans will thrive in the wild and help create a new generation – to avoid extinction and to keep protecting the quality of Borneo's forests.



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Borneo Orangutan Survival Australia

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Your donations provide food, shelter, protection, medicine and companionship for orangutans in our care. Visit www.orangutans.com.au to help us help them.

Donations by cheque are payable to Borneo Orangutan Survival (BOS) Australia at PO Box 3916, Mosman NSW 2088.

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