



Forest Chatter

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From the President ...

I am excited to welcome you to our June edition of Forest Chatter. As the days here in Sydney get colder, BOS Australia is heating up to close the financial year with our biggest appeal of 2024.

This year, we have an exceptional opportunity for you to contribute towards our orangutan conservation efforts: We need to build a new Orangutan Jungle School. I am sure many of you have enjoyed watching the beloved documentary series featuring our orphans' journey towards becoming wild orangutans.

Now, the little students urgently need your **support** so they can go

back to school. On page 2, learn about the importance of our Forest School program and how you can help.

Did you know that orangutans are one of our closest living relatives, sharing 97% of the same DNA? They are empathetic and can even heal their own wounds. Find out more about the latest research on page 3.

In other news, we have a wonderful update about one of our adoption family favourites, sweet Meryl. And we want you to meet our new Enrichment Volunteer Coordinator, who can't wait to welcome you to Borneo this upcoming season. We

have multiple start dates, so don't hesitate to join us!

As always, enjoy the reading!

With endless gratitude,

K WELFORD

Kerin Welford



Sweet Meryl goes home

Another beloved orangutan from our adoption program is ready to enjoy true freedom. We are incredibly proud of Meryl and so thankful to her adopters who supported her during her nine-year rehabilitation journey to the wild.

In early January 2015, our Nyaru Menteng rescue team rushed to Tumbang Jiga village – located in the remote regions of Katingan



Regency in Central Kalimantan – after receiving a report that a baby orangutan was being held captive. In the village, the residents showed the team a tiny infant placed in a lanjung, a traditional Dayak bag made of plaited rattan, usually used for carrying crops or firewood. The bag was so small that the little female could barely move inside.

Our veterinarian carefully lifted her out of the basket and could immediately tell she was suffering from a high fever. The team quickly confiscated the baby and transported her to Nyaru Menteng for medical treatment.

When Meryl arrived at our Nyaru Menteng Centre, she was just eight months old, having spent six months in captivity. She was in deplorable condition, frail and thin, with swollen

hands. We named her Meryl, after the veterinarian who had lovingly taken care of her from the day we rescued her. And look at her now! Over time, Meryl transformed into a lively orangutan, brimming with energy and vitality. She thrived in Forest School, mastering all the survival skills needed for the wild. In December 2021, Meryl advanced to the pre-release stage, demonstrating that she was ready for the last step on her rehabilitation journey: a life in freedom.

Very soon, the BOS team will open Meryl's transport cage in a protected forest of the Bukit Baja Bukit Raja National Park, and the 10-year-old female's life will have finally come full circle—Meryl will be back where she belongs, in the Bornean rainforest.



Forest schools – more than jungle classrooms

Have you ever wondered how our forest schools resemble orangutans' natural habitats? Let's peek in and see!

Sri Rahayu, BOS Foundation's Surrogate Mother Coordinator at our Nyaru Menteng centre, and her fellow babysitters prepare for another wild day in the rainforest. It starts with bringing the eagerly waiting students to Forest School, which is more adventurous than it sounds.

The little ones climb in a wheelbarrow—the jungle school bus—while the older students walk by themselves, hand in hand with a babysitter, or they stubbornly refuse to walk, and the surrogate mothers have no choice but to pick them up and carry.

As the name implies, the jungle schools at our East and Central Kalimantan sanctuaries are in the middle of the Bornean rainforest; hence, walking from one place to another can be challenging. Therefore, we use boardwalks connecting the surrogate mothers' building and orangutan sleeping enclosures to the jungle classrooms. Here, the students are separated according to age and skill level before the first lesson starts.

Dedicated multi-taskers

Sri and her team are vital to our conservation efforts. They are surrogate mothers, babysitters and jungle school teachers in one, ensuring our little orphans receive

their daily dose of tender loving care while learning the essential survival skills their orangutan mothers sadly could never teach them.

To properly prepare the students for life in the wild, our jungle schools must mimic orangutans' natural habitat as closely as possible: Tall trees and dense canopies are perfect for swinging, foraging, and building nests. Small creeks are popular spots for drinking, splashing, and cooling off, and plenty of other wildlife on the school grounds is important for learning how to avoid danger and survive in the wild.

The stakes are high, and the lesson can drain the little students' energy. For example, if a nest just doesn't want to look and feel like one despite putting so much work into folding and arranging branches, it is time for a desperately needed break.

Tall platforms mimic trees

Siri and her team are prepared to empty baskets full of different fruits onto specially designed feeding platforms. These are tall enough to make the orangutans put effort into climbing onto them to grab and eat the food, but still low enough for our surrogate mothers to reach. This activity is crucial for the students to identify high places as their food source since climbing trees to eat is their natural habit.

In the late afternoon, the orangutan trek—with even more tired students choosing a piggyback ride—heads back to the sanctuary to enjoy some downtime before bed. The playground allows the students to explore, socialise, solve puzzles for food rewards, and simply have a good time together.

While some surrogate mothers play around with the orangutans, others prepare the sleeping enclosures by installing tree leaves onto the rubber swings. As with the feeding platforms, the sleeping enclosures

mimic a boreal life in the wild. They are tall to stimulate the orangutans to get used to sleeping on high grounds. And they are safe and secure, so the students get their well-deserved rest - before another day of Forest School begins.

We need your help to build a new Orangutan Jungle School

Now that you understand how crucial our forest schools are to our orangutan conservation efforts, you will realise we cannot risk losing one. But exactly this could happen to our Nyaru Menteng Forest School as it is on government-owned land that we must return one day. Therefore, our parent organisation, the BOS Foundation, has purchased land for a Nyaru Menteng 2 location solely owned by BOS.

One of the benefits of the new location is the opportunity to enhance the infrastructure of our Forest School, creating a nurturing environment where each orangutan can receive the highest-quality care. Your financial support is essential for constructing boardwalks, buildings for our human surrogate mothers, feeding platforms, an orangutan playground, and secure overnight sleeping enclosures.

Please give urgently to help secure a wild future for our little orphans. You can also make tax-deductible donations by **PayPal** or Bank Deposit (Westpac Bank, BSB: 033 112, Account name: Borneo Orangutan Survival (BOS) Australia Incorporated, Account number: 244334).



Are orangutans empathetic?

When surrogate mother Eva recently got injured by a branch, she received unexpected emotional support.

It started as a usual day at the Nyaru Menteng Forest School until orangutan Uru refused to come down the tree for a food break. Instead, he threw branches at those on the forest floor, with one finding its way directly to the forehead of surrogate mother, Eva. It created a cut that immediately began to bleed profusely. Another babysitter panicked, called our medical team, and brought Eva to obtain first aid.

The next day, Eva continued to work and accompanied students to Forest School. However, her wound was causing her pain, so she

chose to keep her distance from the students. Her discomfort didn't go unnoticed. While seeing Eva crying, one orangutan approached her and appeared to hug her.

His actions caught the attention of other orangutans, who then followed suit and came down to hug the babysitter. Unable to take the orangutans' attention away from Eva, the surrogate mothers had no choice but to end the lessons and head back to the main complex. As they started the walk, all the forest school students chose to stroll together behind Eva, displaying what seemed to be genuine empathy.

Orangutans often exhibit social interactions, indicating they experience complex emotions.



Although this topic is extremely challenging to study, there is increasing evidence from behavioural observations that orangutans may be capable of demonstrating empathy and understanding the feelings of others. Babysitter Eva was undoubtedly touched by her students' loving care.

Rakus heals his own injury

Researchers observed a male Sumatran orangutan self-treating his facial wound with a healing plant.

Even though there is evidence of certain self-medication behaviours in animals, the evolutionary biologists from the Max Planck Institute of Animal Behavior, Germany, and Universitas Nasional, Indonesia, say this is the first systematically documented case of active wound treatment with a plant species that contains biologically active substances by a wild animal.

The **study** took place at the Suaq Balimbing research site, a part of the Gunung Leuser National Park in South Aceh, Indonesia. This protected rainforest area is home to approximately 150 critically endangered Sumatran orangutans.

On June 22, 2022, the scientists first noticed that male Rakus had sustained a facial wound on his right

flange, most likely during a fight with a neighbouring male. Three days later, Rakus selectively ripped off leaves of a liana with the common name Akar Kuning (*Fibraurea tinctoria*), chewed on them, and then repeatedly applied the resulting juice onto his wound. Lastly, he entirely covered the injury with the chewed leaves. By June 30, the wound was closed; by August 25, it was barely visible anymore (see Rakus' healing process in the photos).

Isabelle Laumer from the Max Planck Institute of Animal Behavior, the first author of the study, states that this and related liana species found in the tropical forests of Southeast Asia are known for their pain-relieving and fever-reducing effects. They are used in traditional medicine to treat various diseases, such as malaria. Laumer further adds that the substances in the plant have antibacterial, anti-inflammatory, anti-fungal, antioxidant, and other

biological activities relevant to wound healing.

The scientists assume Rakus' behaviour was intentional, as he selectively treated the facial wound on his right flange several times over a considerable amount of time.

While researchers have not yet seen active wound treatment with a healing plant in Bornean orangutans, **scientists observed** them chewing leaves of *Dracaena cantleyi* to create a white, soapy lather, which they then rubbed onto their upper arms or legs.

Given that they saw primarily adult females performing this behaviour, one possible explanation may be that the extra weight added by carrying their offspring when climbing causes them pain. Hence, they rubbed the lather mainly on their arms. Interestingly, the indigenous Dayak people use the same plant to treat sore muscles and joints.

Photo credit: Saffrudin, Armas Fitra, Ulil Azhari, Adami & TNGL & KLHK & MPI & UNAS & YEL



HELLO, I AM AMBER



Please meet Amber Castle, BOS Australia's new Orangutan Enrichment Volunteer Coordinator, who has vast experience and can't wait to welcome you to Borneo.

Are you excited about your new position?

I am ecstatic to be appointed the new Orangutan Enrichment Volunteer Coordinator. This position is a dream role for me, allowing me to use my skills and passions in conservation, animal care, environmental education, travel and tourism, and volunteer engagement. I am eager to contribute to BOS Australia's mission of creating a world where orangutans are free from the threat of extinction and can live in the wild, unharmed by humans.

Where did you work before joining our team?

I have had a long-term career working in zoos, wildlife sanctuaries, and National Parks as a Guest Experience Coordinator, Education Manager, Animal Care Trainer, Keeper, Teacher, and Volunteer Program Coordinator. I have worked with many

species around the globe, including orangutans, chimpanzees, birds, reptiles, horses, insects, dolphins, seals, and all Aussie natives. I have also been a dog trainer along the way. The other side of my career has been working as an Adventure Guide, Trip Leader and Tourism Manager for most of my life.

What motivates you?

I am in awe of the wonderful people I've met along the way who inspire others by educating and walking the talk to do everything possible to save our wildlife and planet.

Assuming someone is still undecided about participating in our Orangutan Enrichment Volunteer Program, how would you convince them to join you at Samboja Lestari?

It is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to meet like-minded people, share our stories, and enrich the lives of many orangutans and sun bears. You will make lifelong memories that challenge, amaze and motivate you to keep educating others about the

plight of one of our closest living relatives. Experience something hands-on differs so much from reading about it or watching a video. So, don't think twice! I can't wait to show you the natural and cultural wonders of Borneo.

What takeaways and experiences do you hope volunteers will gain from participating in our program?

I would love our volunteers to understand how vital orangutans are for a healthy forest ecosystem and our lives in general. I want them to get out of their comfort zone, immerse themselves in nature, look into an orangutan's eyes from afar and be changed forever. I hope they come home knowing they have made a real difference in our world and can now inspire others to do the same.

We still have spots on multiple start dates for our Orangutan Enrichment Volunteer Tours from October 2024 to March 2025. [Explore all the details here.](#)



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primates helping primates

Borneo Orangutan Survival Australia

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We love hearing from you

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Can you help us?

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 7699, Bondi Beach NSW 2026.

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