

# THE ORANGUTAN TROPICAL PEATLAND PROJECT

Issue 2

June 2011

OuTrop carries out research in Indonesia under the support and sponsorship of the Centre for International Cooperation in Sustainable Management of Tropical Peatlands (CIMTROP) at the University of Palangka Raya. We undertake research in the Natural Laboratory for the Study of Peat-swamp Forest (*Laboratorium Alam Hutan Gambut: LAHG-UNPAR*) which CIMTROP manages and protects.



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## Contents

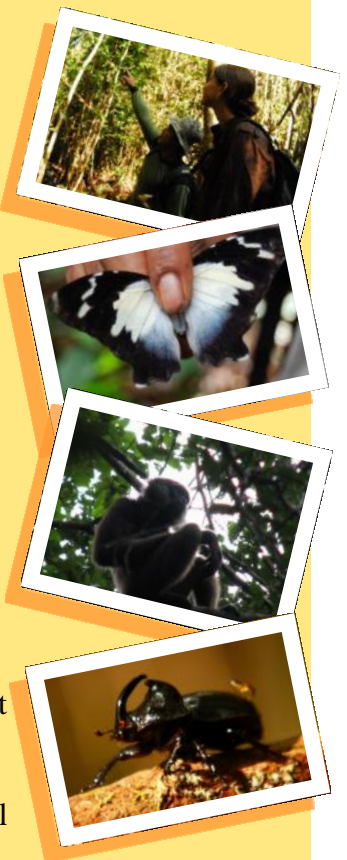
- Sabangau Red Langur Research Project 2
- Orangutan Project Gibbons 3
- Santiano Interview Camera traps 4
- Intern stories 5
- Bat Conference The OuTrop story 6
- Contact details Partners and Sponsors 7

## OuTrop Charity

We have exciting news! OuTrop is rapidly on its way to being a fully registered charity in the UK. This will make it much easier for you to support the work we are doing to learn more about our conservation efforts in Sabangau.

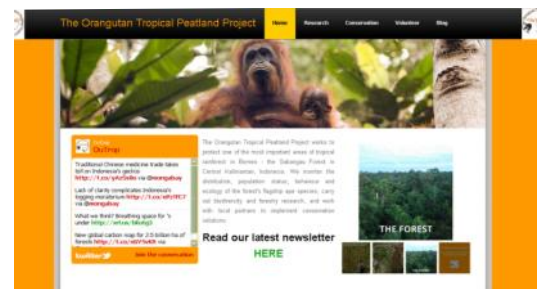
So why are we doing this now? We believe strongly in the need to conserve the peat swamp forests of Indonesia and to understand as much as we can about how they function and interact as an ecosystem. OuTrop is in a unique position to do this as we have the longest running concurrent orangutan and gibbon behaviour projects in Borneo. We study the biodiversity of the forest - from the trees, to the ants to the primates. All are important in the ecology of the peat-swamp forest. To continue this vital work and expand our understanding of this fragile ecosystem further we need support. If you are interested in helping OuTrop continue its ground breaking work and want to find out more about what we do, go to [www.outrop.com](http://www.outrop.com).

We will keep everyone fully posted about when we will “launch” the new charity, so watch this space!



## New Website

You can now find us on our new website at [www.outrop.com](http://www.outrop.com), including links to our blog and other social networking sites, making it even easier to keep up with the OuTrop team out here in Borneo.



A past visitor to Sabangau? We would like to hear from you. If you have any Sabangau stories you want to share with us, email them to [info@outrop.com](mailto:info@outrop.com) and we'll post them.

# Sabangau Red Langur Research Project



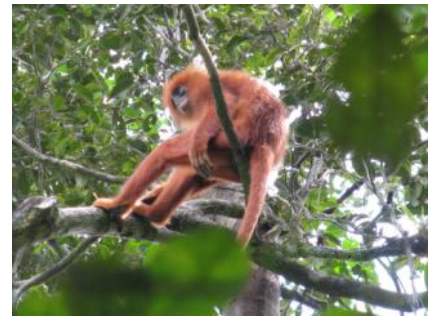
The Sabangau Red Langur Research Project (SRLRP) started in October 2009 as the first study of the red langur (*Presbytis rubicunda*) to take place in ombrogenous peat-swamp forest, and one of only a few ever studies of this primate species. The study is run by husband and wife team David and Yvette Ehlers Smith, and also Supian and Abdul Azis, from the nearby village of Kereng Bangkirai. David goes on to describe this exciting new primate project:

“In October 2009, we began surveys to assess *kelasi* population density in the Mixed Swamp Forest, which accounts for approximately 40% of the total area of Sabangau peat-swamp forest. After three months and 350km of survey effort, we had enough data to begin the ecological research, and gain a fair idea of where some of the groups were in the research grid. Since that time we have had over 500 contact hours with four *kelasi* groups, and have so far recorded over 70 food items from over 50 tree or liana species.

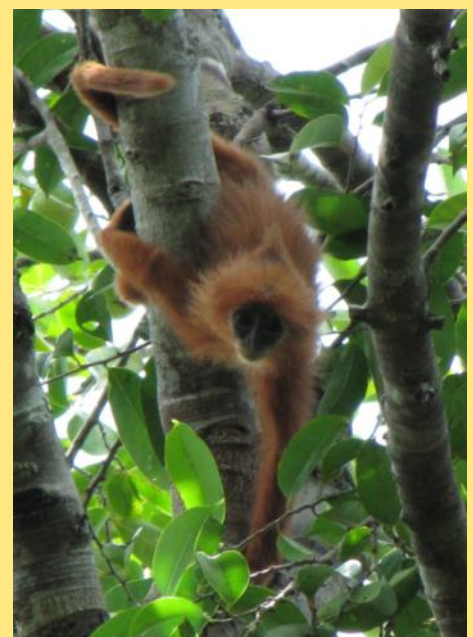
As well as feeding ecology, we are recording data on ranging behaviour, including a unique look at 4D home-ranging (that’s space and time); range-use, overlap and competition avoidance with sympatric gibbons and orangutans; intestinal parasites, and *kelasi* population status and decline due to habitat loss.

Once the flood-waters recede after this year’s wet season, we will be going on remote expeditions into the two other main forest subclasses of Sabangau (the low-pole forest and tall-interior forest, accounting for approximately 40% and 20% of Sabangau Forest respectively) to complete the population density surveys. This will give us a complete picture of densities across different habitat types, and a population count for *kelasi* in the peat-swamp forests of southern Kalimantan, one of the last and most important strongholds for biodiversity on Borneo.”

*Kelasi* fall into the group of primates known as colobine monkeys, which are leaf-eaters and have a specially adapted stomach for this diet. About 90% of their diet overlaps with the orangutans and gibbons with whom they share the forest, but they eat the fruits at a different stage of ripeness, meaning there is less competition for food. They live in groups of approximately seven individuals comprising an adult male, up to three adult females with whom he mates, and their offspring.



Red langurs – or *kelasi* as they are known in the local language – are endemic to Borneo. Although currently listed on the IUCN’s Red List of Endangered Species as “Least Concern”, due to our lack of knowledge and the alarmingly high rate of deforestation on this island, it is vital that this assessment be reviewed and updated. In order to do this, details of their population status and ecological requirements are required to understand how best to conserve them, but much of these data are so far unavailable.



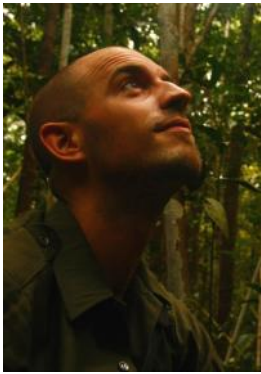
David Ehlers Smith

# Male orangutan ranging & dispersal

Our most recent addition to a long line of PhD students from Cambridge University's Wildlife Research Group working with OuTrop in Sabangau, Ben Buckley, talks to us about his study.

“Having spent a year here between 2007 & 2008 working on the orangutan behavioural project as the field manager, I have returned to Sabangau to carry out my own personal study on an aspect of orangutan behaviour which intrigued, baffled and even (from time to time) tormented me, both at that time and ever since.

My study hopes to reveal the secrets of the ranging behaviour of the male orangutans we were following through the research grid system. Often the known orangutan males would disappear from the established study area, then show up again many months later, sometimes returning with a new scar, or at other times seemingly in much better shape, well fed, strong and healthy. This would usually lead to an evening with the other researchers at camp spent discussing various theories on where these orangutans were going and why.



We would also often find other unknown male individuals as they crossed the research site on an apparently determined mission, and then never see them again. What was driving these animals to find new areas and how far had they travelled? It was these questions that first led me to embark on this research project and focus my interest on the ranging behaviour and dispersal patterns of male orangutans. Now, by investigating these aspects of orangutan life, I aim to satisfy my own curiosities as well as improve our knowledge of the social and mating system of this enigmatic species.”

Ben Buckley

## Gibbons!

As part of our commitment to on-going training and improvement the whole behaviour team of researchers, staff and interns involved in the ape behaviour projects participated in a refresher training day on May 13<sup>th</sup>, and another on the 27<sup>th</sup>, with more planned for the future. The team were shown presentations about the results and new findings from the research and discussed changes to data collection methodology to advance our project and the data we are collecting.

The Gibbon Project has been progressing well despite the weather and frequent rain. We have been successful in following gibbons to their sleeping tree on 5 occasions and have been collecting interesting data on gibbon behaviour and feeding ecology. For example, the gibbons are often found to move sleeping tree during the night and this is something we are investigating as this has not been reported at other sites. Fruit is still dominating the gibbons' diet as there is still a lot of different species of fruit available for them to eat.

Also in May we welcomed a team from the ADM Capital Foundation based in Hong Kong. Despite the wet and the mud the team were able to follow wild gibbons and orangutans and experience first-hand the fun of working in a swamp!



## Interview with Santiano

Santiano has been working with OuTrop for 6 years. He is our resident expert on the tree species found in the forest, an excellent orangutan nest-spotter and all-round great guy. Here Joana interviews him about his experiences working for OuTrop.



**J: How long have you been working here and what do you do?**

**S:** I started in 2004, in February. For the first two and a half years I worked with the orangutan behaviour team, following orangutans. But we had other work to do as well, cutting and tagging transects. I changed about a year ago. I keep the nursery (with Udin), do phenology and orangutan nest survey. I like following but now I have a daughter I have to go back to Kereng and cannot stay here [at camp overnight].

**J: What are you doing in the nursery?**

**S:** I take the seedlings from the forest and plant them in the nursery. We then measure and look for changes in growth. [When they are big enough] we plant them in the side of the forest. [This refers to the burnt edge of the forest, along the river]. We take seeds from fruit from the forest and we germinate in square plates. For seeds we check every week, for wildlings we check every 3 months.

**J: And you work on the phenology team as well?**

**S:** I work to do phenology here. We have to check every month. We have a look for when they are flowering or have new leaves... So we know which species are fruiting in the month. There are 7 plots. It is good because we have the orangutan project here. We know the orangutans come for this month and to this place because of the fruit/flower. For three years I have done the data entry to put in the computer. I also lead the [orangutan nest] re-survey as well.

**J: What did you do before working with OuTrop?**

**S:** I worked with jelutong [rubber trees] with my dad. I learnt from my dad. He showed me "this is this tree..." I started when I was 18 or 19. I like working in the forest.

**J: Why is the work OuTrop does important?**

**S:** It is very important to keep the carbon still in the world. Without carbon maybe everyone is... wow! I like working in the forest. To save the forest is very interesting so I like to work here to see what I can do.

**J: Last word?**

**S:** Don't worry, be happy!

## New Camera Trap Photos

In the last two months the camera traps have continued to reveal interesting photos of some of the more elusive animals found in the forest such as sun bears, mouse deer, Malay civet, bearded pig and banded linsang. They also captured photos of vulnerable cat species including the marbled cat (*P. marmorata*), leopard cat (*P. bengalensis*) and clouded leopard (*N. diardi*) which are listed as vulnerable species on the IUCN red list. These photos are used to investigate the distribution, habitat associations, activity and density of Bornean wild cats and other mammals.

It is still the wet season in Sabangau, raining almost every day, keeping the forest from drying out. The animals like to use the planks we have along some of the transects to keep out of the water. We have placed camera traps along these, getting some amazing photos.



## Stories from the interns



Hi, I'm Jess, the current gibbon behaviour intern at OuTrop. The majority of

my time here is spent following groups of gibbons around the forest, as part of a team of 2 researchers. The easiest way to locate a group of gibbons in the forest is to follow the sound of their morning duet. When we are lucky enough to locate our target group for the day we then try and follow them for as long as possible, to record the daily activities and behaviour of a focal individual from the group. I feel very lucky to spend such long periods of time in the company of these amazing apes, the gibbons never fail to keep me entertained. Every day we see something new and exciting in the forest, and even on days when we are unable to find our gibbons, we come back to camp with a story to tell. I am having the best time working in the wonderful swamp of Sabangau, the last 2 months have flown by and I look forward to the next 2 with great anticipation of all the incredible experiences that are no doubt still to come.



Hello, my name is Eric Perlett and I am the current biodiversity monitoring intern. I have come to the Sabangau For-

est to contribute to the research and conservation of this unique ecosystem and its diverse array of animal and plant life. During my time here I intend on gaining a wide range of experience conducting a variety of survey and monitoring techniques for different organisms. I will also be influential in the development of a monitoring protocol designed to look at invertebrates and gain an understanding of their responses to environmental disturbance, using their presence or absence as bio-indicators to reflect a clear representation of overall habitat quality. I decided to focus my efforts on the monitoring of ant species within the forest due to their undeniable importance and sheer abundance within tropical ecosystems. I am very much enjoying my time in the forest, and have been lucky enough to participate in some primate research, and turtle surveys.



Hello! I am the orangutan intern and have been here for a little over two months already! Time

does fly in the forest! A typical day for the orangutan intern can start before the sun comes up at 4 am. I, with one other person, leave early to get to the orangutan's nest before they wake up and leave their nest. As the orangutan emerges from its nest, we start collecting behavioral data. One person is the main data taker who, among other data, records every five minutes the activity of the orangutan as the second person marks on the GPS the location of the orangutan and tags the tree from which it eats. This process continues all day until the orangutan makes a nest at night, which can occur anytime after 3 pm. After that we mark the nest with cotton and head back to camp to get refreshed to start it all over again the next day. Although the days can become long, there is nothing as amazing as being able to spend time with a wild orangutan in the forest.

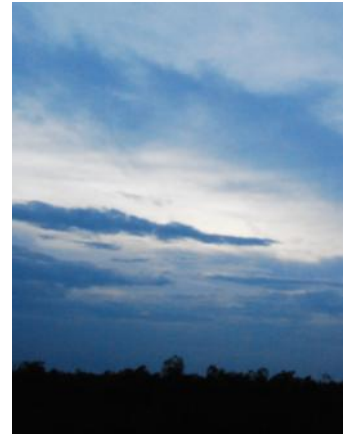
Fancy following in the footsteps of Jess, Eric and Amanda? We take interns every 6 months. If you are interested in learning field techniques, contributing to our research and experiencing life at a research post out in the jungle as well as immersing yourself in a bit of Indonesian culture then you can find out more about our internships on our website. We will post the dates of the next intake soon. Once we do, download an application form and send it, along with your CV, to [info@outrop.com](mailto:info@outrop.com).

At University or just looking for a shorter experience? Why not volunteer with us? We run 7 week expeditions from July to November. Help us collect essential data and maintain our site, learn field techniques, and help conserve the Sabangau forest. See the volunteer section of our website for past stories from our long-running volunteer project.

# Bat Conference

## Second International South-East Asian Bat Conference, Bogor, Indonesia

The Second International South-East Asian Bat Conference ran from 6-9 June in Bogor, Java and included talks, posters and priority sessions on the full variety of contemporary bat research in the area. This ranged from genetics, to systematics and taxonomy, behaviour, ecology and conservation. OuTrop scientist Dr Mark Harrison attended the meeting, where he presented the results of the research conducted together with three other OuTrop scientists and other collaborators documenting the hunting of large flying foxes (*Pteropus vampyrus*) throughout Central Kalimantan and talked about interview survey methods during the Flying Fox Priority Session. This research will be published shortly in "Biological Conservation" and will help contribute towards revising the IUCN Old World Fruit Bat Conservation Action Plan.



## The OuTrop Story

OuTrop was founded in 1999 by two graduate zoologists who were members of the 1993-96 University of Nottingham research expeditions, whose initial research identified Sabangau as home to the largest orangutan population in the world. Since then OuTrop have developed from these seasonal expeditions into a full-time research and conservation project and now have gone from strength to strength with over 15 full time staff. In partnership with CIMTROP, we aim to bridge the gap between academic research and practical conservation solutions, with a focus on primate, felid, biodiversity monitoring and forestry research, to development long-term sustainable conservation strategies for the Sabangau Forest.

In 1999 the situation was bleak. Illegal loggers were cutting trees all over Sabangau; a year earlier 10% of the forest had been destroyed by massive fires and the peatland was being drained, hunted and exploited unsustainably. During our 12 years of work here we have surveyed orangutans across this vast landscape, documented rampant illegal logging, supported habitat protection units, fire-fighting teams and hydrology restoration and replanting activities, and brought over 250 research students and volunteers here. We are proud to play an active part of the conservation of the Sabangau Forest.

Our long term partners are CIMTROP, led by Dr Suwido Limin at the University of Palangkaraya, who manage the Natural Laboratory of Peat-swamp Forest in the northern Sabangau. This critical area of 50,000 hectares is the site of our research work and is protected by the TSA Patrol Unit – a team made up of concerned and committed people from the local village of Kereng Bangkirai; managed by CIMTROP and funded by OuTrop and our supporters. The TSA stopped illegal logging in 2004, keep the area free of disturbance and have facilitated education, awareness and community support projects. The LAHG-UNPAR is now recognised as a major centre for peat-swamp biodiversity research, and OuTrop as specialists in peat-swamp forest ecology. We remain dedicated to helping the people of Central Kalimantan protect their natural heritage and would like to thank all our supporters on their behalf.





[www.outrop.com](http://www.outrop.com)

[info@outrop.com](mailto:info@outrop.com)

Keep in touch with us!



The Orangutan Tropical Peatland Project works to protect one of the most important areas of tropical rainforest in Borneo - the Sabangau Forest in Central Kalimantan, Indonesia. We monitor the distribution, population status, behaviour and ecology of the forest's flagship ape species, carry out biodiversity and forestry research, and work with local partners to implement conservation solutions.

Our research and eco-volunteer program is a focus for conservation efforts and provides much-needed employment for the local community of Kereng Bangkirai. OuTrop also supports the continued work of the CIMTROP TSA team who protect the forest from illegal logging and fires.



## Contact

### OuTrop Directors

**Simon Husson**

Managing Director  
Director of Conservation and Biodiversity Research  
[simon\\_husson@yahoo.com](mailto:simon_husson@yahoo.com)

**Dr Helen Morrogh Bernard**

Founding Director  
Director of Orangutan Research  
[hmorroghbernard@yahoo.com](mailto:hmorroghbernard@yahoo.com)



**Dr Susan Cheyne**

Director of Gibbon and Felid Research  
[susancheyne76@yahoo.com](mailto:susancheyne76@yahoo.com)

**Laura D'Arcy**

Director of Forestry Research  
[lauradarcy@yahoo.com](mailto:lauradarcy@yahoo.com)

**Karen Jeffers**

Director of Operations  
[karenjeffers@msn.com](mailto:karenjeffers@msn.com)

Jalan Semeru 91  
Palangkaraya  
Central Kalimantan  
Indonesia

