

# Orangutan Tropical Peatland Research Project 2008 Project Description and Request for Volunteers

[www.orangutanrop.com](http://www.orangutanrop.com)  
[info@orangutanrop.com](mailto:info@orangutanrop.com)



Thank you for your interest in the Orangutan Tropical Peatland Research Project. This document contains background information about our project and the research we will be carrying out during summer 2008. The accompanying application pack contains more information you will need to participate on our project. We look forward to hearing from you!

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

### What is OuTrop?

The Orangutan Tropical Peatland Research 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 – the orangutan and agile gibbon - carry out biodiversity and forestry research, provide scientific feedback on ecosystem health to conservation managers, and work with our local partners to implement conservation solutions. Our earliest work identified the Sabangau forest as home to the largest orangutan population remaining in Borneo, bringing the region to the forefront of orangutan conservation efforts. This has resulted in the forest obtaining protected-area status. We work in partnership with the Centre for International Cooperation for management of Tropical Peatland (CIMTROP) based at the University of Palangkaraya, Indonesia. Through this partnership we support local conservation efforts by funding and/or introducing a range of conservation projects, including forest protection patrols, fire-fighting, environmental education and habitat restoration, primarily through the damming of illegal logging extraction canals and drainage channels. Our research and eco-volunteer program has been running since 2001 and is a focus for local conservation efforts, providing much-needed employment and financial benefits for the local community and replacing illegal logging as the main activity and source of income in the northern Sabangau Forest.

## WHY WE NEED YOU

We need volunteers to help collect vital research data for conservation. We have an on-going program of research in which we monitor orangutan and gibbon density; elements of forest biodiversity; and habitat structure, productivity, regeneration and disturbance. We have a number of monitoring stations in the jungle at which we collect these data annually, in order to assess trends in the condition of the forest and its wildlife. We use these results to provide feedback on the state of the habitat, report on problems and

assess the effectiveness or otherwise of conservation programs. We need intelligent, fit, enthusiastic individuals to join our team and help us collect these vital data. We offer a challenging seven week program of field research with opportunities to carry out your own research project, together with visits to the Nyaru Menteng Orangutan Rehabilitation Project and Tanjung Puting National Park.

## WHERE YOU WILL WORK

The Sabangau River is a minor blackwater river in southern Borneo, in the Indonesian province of Central Kalimantan. The Sabangau forest covers an area of some 580,000 hectares of peat-swamp forest, the largest single area of lowland rainforest remaining in Kalimantan. Peat swamp forest is a little-known, relatively inaccessible habitat, yet remarkably diverse and home to over 30% of the remaining population of wild orangutans in Borneo. Four distinct habitat sub-types are identified here; varying in structure and vegetation composition from the depauperate, wet, low pole forest to the diverse, dry, deep peat tall interior forest on the watershed. The latter is unique and remarkably diverse, standing on peat that is 13m deep and 20,000 years old, it is found nowhere else in the world. The Sabangau forest supports a huge diversity of plant life, including large timber trees such as ramin and swamp meranti, a wide variety of pitcher plants and sustainable commercial species such as rattan and jelutong, from which the sap is used to make latex. Eight species of primate including the orang-utan, agile gibbon, slow loris and pig-tailed macaque are found here; other notable animal life includes the sun-bear, bearded pig, sambar deer, clouded leopard, marbled cat, civets, treeshrews, water monitors, pythons, over 200 species of bird including the rhinoceros hornbill, Asian paradise flycatcher, Wallace's hawk eagle and the endemic Bornean bristlehead; and a large and diverse invertebrate community.

Our base camp is the Setia Alam Field Station, sited just inside the edge of the forest approximately 1 hour by car, boat and small train from the provincial capital of Palangkaraya. Facilities here are comfortable, including accommodation in purpose-built huts, washing and toilet facilities, office and laboratory, kitchen, drinking water, generator, radio, security guard and cook. We have a network of trails and permanent study plots inside the forest, and also carry out research at a number of satellite camps in the heart of the jungle. We have built basic huts at each of these sites and camp out here for periods of up to a week at a time.

## WHAT YOU WILL DO

We run three expeditions of seven weeks between mid-June and mid-November. This is the dry season and the best time for carrying out research. We require volunteers to assist on most parts of the project, for a minimum period of seven weeks with us. The team will initially work from Base camp, beginning the research whilst acclimatising to the conditions and receiving training on the research methods. Later on we will visit some of the remote field stations where we will camp in basic huts, sleeping under

canvas, washing in the river and working during the day.

We have three main areas of research: 1) Monitoring habitat condition and status of biodiversity. For this we survey orangutans by counting their nests, gibbons by triangulating their morning calls and carry out line transect surveys of other primate species. We also survey butterfly and bird diversity and density in areas of differing logging disturbance, and our looking to start pilot projects on other taxa. We measure trees in permanent habitat plots to monitor changes in forest structure at each of our monitoring stations. 2) Assessing long-term regeneration, succession, and productivity processes in forest subject to different disturbances including selective logging, fire, natural gaps and canal construction. We have a large number of plots in which we measure elements of tree size, health and productivity and seedling and sapling density, growth and survival. 3) Studies of orangutan and gibbon behavioural ecology. We follow habituated individuals of both species in order to better understand their behaviour, social interactions, food competition and ability to live in a disturbed forest. Although this does not form part of the behaviour program we do offer the opportunity to spend a day or two following both orangutans and gibbons with our behaviour research team, circumstances permitting.

Conditions can be harsh in peat swamp forest – it is typically hot and humid, with difficult terrain. It is therefore extremely important that all members of the team are physically and mentally fit. Each research project will be coordinated by a separate OuTrop staff leader, who will provide full training for members of his/her team. Volunteers will get the opportunity to spend on each of the projects running during the season. The success of the expedition relies on all members of the team helping out in all aspects of the project, from carrying out research to maintaining transects, from shopping for supplies in Palangkaraya to collecting and purifying water at remote field sites.

In addition to the research work, visits will be organised to the nearby Nyaru Menteng Orang-utan Reintroduction Centre, where we will see orphaned orangutans being trained for re-release into the forest, and older orangutans already released onto the beautiful Pulau Kaja island. There may also be an opportunity to visit the Kalaweit gibbon rehabilitation project. A four-day trip to the scenic and diverse Tanjung Puting National Park at the end of the project is arranged. Here you will see proboscis monkeys and long-tailed macaques along the banks of the Sekonyer River, and visit Camp Leakey, the site of the first permanent orang-utan research project in Kalimantan and home to many adult orangutans successfully reintroduced into the forest.

### **Personal projects**

Opportunities exist for BSc/MSc projects or dissertations to be undertaken in most of these project areas. During the life of the volunteer programme 16 MSc and 25 BSc projects have been undertaken by volunteers. Projects must be original; contribute to the existing body of knowledge and have a conservation application; must be planned well in advance; be feasibly completed within 10 weeks; and be approved by your supervisor. There can be a limit of two projects per expedition group. Volunteers

interested in undertaking a project should contact us as soon as possible, so we can inform you of our research goals for this year and then work together to develop objectives and methodology.

## WHAT TO DO NOW

To apply to join the expedition, please download and fill in an application form, and send it back to us with your deposit and passport photos. We will contact you shortly after to let you know if you have been successful. People not resident in the UK should contact us for instructions on how to apply.

Each volunteer will be required to make a contribution to cover the cost of his or her participation in the expedition. This is £1300 for seven weeks, with extended stay costing £130 per additional week, not including visa extension. This covers accommodation in Palangkaraya, airport pick-up, transport to and from camp, use and maintenance of base camp and facilities (including electricity, food, cook, security guard, equipment and medical supplies), Indonesian staff, travel to remote survey sites, research visa and trips to Nyaru Menteng Orangutan Reintroduction Centre, Tangkiling and Tanjung Puting National Park. The cost also includes a contribution to our long-term research and conservation work, including the Forest Patrol Unit and Fire-fighting Team. Costs you will need to bear include international and internal airfares and insurance. Day-to-day costs whilst on the expedition are typically small, for drinks, food and local transport whilst in town (approx. £5 per day), cigarettes, chocolate, e-mail and souvenirs.

Thank you for your interest and we look forward to hearing from you.  
The OuTrop Team