

Supporter Newsletter

Call of the wild



Issue 50 - February 2026

Hello from Orangutan Appeal UK

Our mission is to **protect** and **preserve** the critically endangered **orangutan** and their **rainforest home** by funding projects that aim to:

Rescue & rehabilitate orphaned, injured and displaced orangutans

Educate to raise global awareness of the orangutans' plight

Conserve and protect their natural habitat in Borneo

Welcome to the latest edition of our bi-annual newsletter.

We are pleased to share some recent updates with you, made possible by your generous support.

We now have 14 staff at Sepilok, including our new Education Officer. We celebrated a very special milestone of our longest serving team member; vet nurse, Ibri. She has devoted her working life to caring for orphaned, injured and displaced orangutans. Her warmth, patience and knowledge shine through in everything she does. We are so grateful for the incredible dedication she continues to bring to the team and the orangutans she cares for.



We were delighted to join the graduation ceremony of the Wildlife Junior Rangers, a conservation-focused programme run by St Michael's School in Sandakan, that gives young people hands-on experience and knowledge about protecting wildlife and their habitats. I spoke at a conservation forum titled "Wildlife Vet: A Critically Endangered Job in Malaysia", hosted by the NGO Pangolin Aware, sharing with veterinary students and practicing vets why this role is so important and how the shortage of wildlife vets places extreme pressure on conservation efforts.

The team were called out to help three wild orangutans. Two had been seen in plantation areas, and one had entered a village. As often happens, the team were unable to locate two of them, as orangutans usually move on if they are not lost or injured. Sadly, this was not the case for the third orangutan. He had suffered serious injuries and did not survive. We believe he may have been involved in a fight with another male, possibly over territory, as it is becoming increasingly scarce.

Alongside this work, we planted more fig trees in and around the reserve, took part in the WARN Asia wildlife rescue conference

and worked with the electricity board to insulate live cables that posed a deadly risk to wildlife. We also facilitated workshops, visits and training sessions led by specialists, including a world-renowned wildlife veterinary surgeon.

Essential items have been supplied, including x-ray equipment, a soft-release cage, health testing and medical supplies, walkie-talkies and tools. We've also renewed our support for COP (Centre for Orangutan Protection) in East Kalimantan after their plea for assistance – more on that in the next edition.

Finally, as well as the team training the orangutans, they have undertaken some training for themselves including, orangutan food identification, tracking and tree climbing. This work allows us not only to protect orangutans, but to better understand them.

One thing that never fails to fascinate us is the social side of orangutans. Often described as solitary, this is not always the case. At Sepilok, we regularly witness friendships that are rarely seen in fully wild populations. This is largely because nearly all the orangutans at Sepilok had to be raised outside their natural environment due to tragic circumstances. Many choose to stay close to the centre rather than establish their own territory. Even in the wild, female orangutans will often stay within the area they were raised. Over time, this has given us a unique window into just how flexible orangutans can be and how, just like humans, friendships really do matter.



Every day, your support makes a meaningful difference. You are helping to protect and preserve orangutans and the forests they depend on. We couldn't do it without you – thank you.

Adrienne

Adrienne Powell, Manager

Education and Outreach



The Education and Outreach Programme helps to bring orangutans to life for the people who share their forests. Our team is perfectly placed to visit local schools and communities and share their first-hand experiences of working with orangutans. An array of orangutan food samples, models and other interactive props help spark the interest of audiences of all ages and generate opportunities for our staff to share their vast knowledge.

Their stories both engage and educate, as they explain more about orangutan behaviour and the challenges they face in the wild. Many of the attendees to these events live in close proximity to orangutans, but understand very little about them.



The programme helps to highlight ways in which communities can help protect orangutans and their shared forests. Having this knowledge inspires confidence and empowers communities to make a tangible difference.

Orangutan Caring Week brought a surge of community-focused conservation activity to Sabah throughout the months of November and December.

Ape-mazing facts!

When orangutans feel threatened, they may make a sharp sound called a 'kiss-squeak'.

By holding leaves in front of their mouth, they can lower the pitch and make the call sound more impressive. This is a clever way of appearing more intimidating when faced with potential danger.



Exhibits at the Court Complex in Kota Kinabalu encouraged visitors to reflect on their impact and think about how small daily actions can protect wildlife and forests. Tour operators and guides gathered to discuss how they can guide visitors in a way that protects orangutans, the forest and encourages ethical tourism.

Schools were a hub of energy. At Langkabong, pupils greeted orangutan mascot Pongo with big smiles, taking part in puzzles, quizzes and fun ice-breakers and in Kota Kinabatangan, students planted trees to highlight the importance of forests for wildlife. All the activities created a genuine celebration of learning, nature and community.

New Education Officer

We are delighted to introduce Jonrey, our Education Officer. In this newly created role, he will lead our education work across Sabah, coordinating school and community visits, delivering our education programme and supporting learning activities at Sepilok for visitors.

Jonrey will work closely with community groups, schools and conservation partners to share his knowledge of orangutans, their habitat and the urgent need to protect them. Through this work, he aims to build understanding, spark curiosity and inspire people to take action.

We are excited to see the positive change he will help create. Please join us in giving him a warm welcome.



New Education Officer, Jonrey



Friends **Agop**, **Napagang** and **Adie** continue to grow in confidence, ability and size. The three youngest orangutans on the rehabilitation programme are excellent at encouraging one another to develop and advance everything they are learning. At the nursery, they have the opportunity to put these new skills to the test. Whether they are learning how to open a new fruit they've never seen before, climb higher in their favourite tree or socialise with older orangutans – every day is a school day.

Other orangutans who visit the nursery include wild mother **Matamis** and her son, **Titi** (pictured above with Adie). When they are around, it doesn't take long for the inquisitive youngsters to initiate play behaviours. This is an important way for orangutans to learn as well as being very fun! It helps Titi become more independent and teaches them all about socialising and boundaries.



Luffy



Hujan

Luffy is a very active and curious orangutan who seems to find fun and mischief wherever he goes. Whether he's training in the forest with **Oyo** and **Tombilina** or at the outdoor nursery with **Hujan**, Luffy is always on the move encouraging others to play.

Hujan tries to ignore Luffy's playful antics but often can't resist getting involved in the game – especially if

Koko or **Joss** are involved! For them, it's exciting to have the younger orangutans to chase, tease and hide from. They are a fantastic four and very good friends.



Agop



Napagang

Adopt an orangutan ↗

If you'd like to learn more about Napagang, Agop or Hujan, you can adopt them.

Scan the QR code or visit: orangutan-appeal.org.uk/adopt

Since **Tombi** completed his rehabilitation in 2022, his confidence has soared. He is spending more time in the forest, finding his own food, exploring further afield and fully embracing his independence. He recently made a visit to the outdoor nursery where Luffy was hanging on the ropes. He looked a little unsure when Tombi first emerged from the trees, but soon the pair were playfully chasing one another around.

Another familiar face is **Nami**. Although she too has completed her rehabilitation, she still enjoys spending time at Sepilok where she feels comfortable and safe. Gentle by nature, she likes to visit the younger orangutans. Seeing her healthy, confident and independent reminds us of how far she has come and how successful her time on the rehabilitation programme was.



Having been orphaned and rescued at just one year old, **Cinta** completed her rehabilitation in 2015 and has lived independently in the Sepilok-Kabili Reserve ever since. Cinta has recently become a mother to a beautiful baby girl. Her daughter has been named **Saranghae** which means 'I love you' in Korean – the perfect pairing for Cinta, which means 'love' in Malay.

Bella Luna is a wild orangutan living in the reserve and regularly visits the centre. In 2023, she emerged from the forest with a new born daughter who has been named **Annie**, in honour of a long-time volunteer and supporter. It is not unusual for mother orangutans to spend time together in the wild and Sepilok is no exception – the mums relax together while their little ones play!



Orangutans are often described as semi-solitary, yet at Sepilok we regularly see them interacting and forming close friendships. These bonds are likely supported by the supplementary food provided, which reduces competition and allows multiple orangutans to spend time together in the same area. **Ospie** and **Koko** are a prime example of this behaviour and the pair are rarely seen apart.

Male and female meetings usually only occur in the wild when two individuals are ready to mate, however, **Beryl** and **Joss** spend a lot of time together, sharing food and relaxing at the feeding platform. Some of these friendships could stem from infancy, where young orangutans like **Cerah** and **Adie** have the opportunity to learn from each other and grow together.



Two wild male orangutans have recently started visiting the feeding platforms. **Abdul** and **Nasabak** have come from within the reserve and are normally side-by-side. The staff give each visiting orangutan a name so they can easily recognise them and monitor their general health and wellbeing from a distance.

Canyon is a very sociable orangutan but spends more of her time with males than females. If **Malim**, the dominant male, is at the feeding platform, then she is usually by his side. When he's not there she spends time with **Joss** and **Budin**, other wild males. Canyon usually avoids the mother orangutans with young infants as they are very protective over their babies, but **Kacy**, mother to 6-year old **Didi**, is more relaxed about letting Canyon play with her more mature daughter.

Regrow Borneo

Regrow Borneo combine hands-on forest restoration with scientific research to understand and guide forest recovery in Sabah's Lower Kinabatangan region. We are proud to continue supporting their work reconnecting fragmented habitats, safeguarding orangutans and protecting the region's rich wildlife.

Update from Prof. Benoit Goossens, Director, Danau Girang Field Centre

Across five sites we are monitoring various forests at different stages of life, from newly planted areas to older restored patches and nearby natural forest. This is giving us a better understanding about how these ecosystems recover over time.

We carry out biodiversity surveys at each site, focusing on birds, mammals, dung beetles and amphibians. While overall species numbers are similar across each area, we have noticed that some patterns are starting to change.



Species that are wholly dependent on the forest, including orangutans and hornbills, are beginning to return to newly planted areas, while older restored sites are mostly home to animals that can adapt to a range of conditions, such as macaques.

Flooding and camera trap failures caused some delays in monitoring larger mammals, but the team continues to gather valuable insights into how these unique floodplain forests recover and support wildlife.

Since 2020 the project has captured over 1,000 tons of carbon and restored more than 40 hectares of forest. Drone surveys show mixed results: some areas are thriving, while others have struggled after prolonged flooding.

Thanks to long-term monitoring, the team is building a clearer picture of how forests, wildlife and carbon storage respond to restoration, helping to protect orangutans and the rainforest.

Borneo Nature Foundation (BNF)

Update from Lauren Vyvyan, Partnerships & Philanthropy Lead, BNF


Since 2010, we have been working to restore peat swamps by reversing the damage caused by man-made canals that drain water from the forest. By building dams in these canals, we can slow the loss of water and return the forest to its natural, waterlogged state. Keeping the peat wet is one of the most effective ways to prevent fires and protect wildlife, including orangutans.

Over the years, we have built 32 dams, blocking two canals near the Bangah River. In 2025, we greatly expanded this work, constructing 80 dams across five canals. This helped re-wet two large areas along the Rasau and Bangah rivers.

A new firefighting team was launched in Pilang Village to expand patrol coverage to the east of Sebangau National Park. By the peak of the dry season nine teams, comprising 145 trained firefighters, were actively protecting the forest.

From June to November, throughout the entire dry season, patrols took place daily or every other day. Combined with improved training in monitoring software, this effort led to a remarkable result: zero fires were recorded in our working areas this year.




One of our objectives is to raise awareness of the orangutans' plight. This involves staying up to date with the latest research and ongoing efforts in Borneo to protect and preserve the orangutan and its rainforest home. This not only helps us to allocate funding where it is most needed, but also serves as an educational tool that we can share with you. Below are a couple of recent publications we found particularly interesting and hope you do too. To learn more, please visit the [Educational Resources page on our website](#). 



Orangutans master their food knowledge by learning from others


For a young orangutan in a forest full of potential foods, learning what is safe to eat is a big job. While they gain some knowledge through trial and error, most of an orangutan's food repertoire comes from watching and learning from others. After spending up to eight years with their mother, wild orangutans will have learned to recognise around 250 different plant species. This shows how important social learning is for orangutans and that their diets are passed down through observation rather than discovered alone. It also highlights why it is so valuable for the orphans at Sepilok to have exposure to more experienced orangutans.

Research published in *Nature Human Behaviour*: [‘Culture is critical in driving orangutan diet development past individual potentials’](#) by Howard-Spink et al., 2025 



How environment shapes social bonds between Orangutans

The more we learn about wild orangutans, the more apparent it becomes they are not as solitary as once believed. Research supports what we've seen for years at Sepilok – orangutans form social bonds and learn from one another. Many individuals enjoy spending time together and some form particularly close friendships. This research suggests that sociability is shaped depending on where orangutans are raised and the conditions they live in. At Sepilok, supplementary food and minimal competition within the reserve create more opportunities for orangutans to interact and develop strong connections.

Research published in *iScience*: [‘Orangutan males make increased use of social learning opportunities, when resource availability is high’](#) by Morchen et al., 2024 



Conservation science in Sabah

We are pleased to be able to fund scientific research that guides orangutan conservation and habitat restoration. Two of our current projects focus on orangutan health in Sepilok and forest recovery in the Kinabatangan.

At Sepilok, Dr Nisa's PhD research is focusing on the health and nutrition of orangutans. Working closely with the team, she has collected samples from all the resident orangutans to evaluate dietary and nutritional intake and overall health.

She is also studying the spread and impact of malaria, a disease transmitted by mosquitoes that affects both humans and orangutans. Dr Nisa's detailed analyses will provide valuable information to guide treatment, feeding and care protocols, not just for orangutans at Sepilok, but across all rescue and rehabilitation centres in Borneo and Sumatra.

Marlina's two-year Master's project explores the role of primates in helping forests recover and regenerate. She is studying how orangutans and other wildlife spread seeds in forests previously cleared for agriculture, which have since been replanted by Regrow Borneo.



This research is crucial for understanding how fragmented landscapes can be restored to support orangutans and their fellow forest dwellers. Marlina is the first student to receive funding through the Diana Ramirez Memorial Fund, which we established in collaboration with Danau Girang Field Centre to support local students to pursue an education and career in conservation.

We are proud to support both Dr Nisa and Marlina's academic journeys and look forward to seeing what their research reveals.

Thank you!

To help us celebrate our 25 year anniversary, **Beverley Harris**, donated her time and talent again by crocheting 25 gorgeous novelty orangutans for us to sell to fellow supporters. The beautifully hand-crafted apes sold out almost immediately raising an impressive £625!



A huge thank you to Beverley, Ellen Kantarellen (pattern designer) and to everyone that ordered one of these adorable orangutans.

Our thanks go to **Tim Squire, Ross Bellringer, Jo Green, John and Emma Edwards, Carrie Littley** and **William Senior** who took on the challenge of participating in the Great North Run for us in September. Both Tim and Ross completed the run with their orangutan mascots for company.



We would also like to thank **James Lumley** and **Katie Allen** who supported us by running the Royal Parks Half Marathon in October, despite both suffering with colds on race day. We are so grateful for your commitment and determination – well done!

Other fantastic fundraisers include **Laura Winder**, who successfully completed a virtual 5K Big Fun Run. This alternative to traditional public runs, offers a more flexible (but equally as challenging!) approach to raising funds – you can complete it at your own pace, in your own time and anywhere that suits you.

Poppy Charlesworth wanted an orangutan themed party for her 8th birthday and ended up raising an amazing £420 by selflessly forgoing presents and asking her generous party guests if they'd like to donate instead. She is now the proud adopter of not one, but two of our orangutans and we are so grateful for her support.



We also extend our sincere thanks to the businesses that have supported us including **Alpine Coffee Shop, Hangin' Pizzeria, Platform Galeri, Oriel Ospie, Jenks Brands / N'eat, Strip Distribution, Centaur Food, J Leon Group, Humphreys Law Ltd, Brick Owl, Teach Rex, Journaway, Annie's Natural Soaps** and **Folkestone St Mary's school**.

A Bornean adventure awaits you

Have you ever dreamed of working in the rainforest and helping protect one of the world's most remarkable species?

We offer unique, fully-funded, three-month volunteer placements in Borneo throughout the year.

If you want to work at the front line of orangutan conservation and have a:

- proven interest or background in conservation
- passion for orangutans and their habitat
- flair for customer relations
- warm, friendly personality

We want to hear from you!

Visit: orangutan-appeal.org.uk/volunteer-work-for-us

Open to UK residents only. We accept applicants for this role year-round and placements are available every three months.



orangutan-appeal.org.uk



info@orangutan-appeal.org.uk



+44 (0) 1590 623443



Orangutan Appeal UK
New Forest Estate Offices
Lyndhurst Road
Brockenhurst
Hampshire
SO42 7RL
United Kingdom

Get in touch

Please contact us with any feedback, or to share your stories or photos. Whether you are planning a fundraising event or seeking information, we would love to hear from you.

Follow us on social media

