

# Protection and restoration of critical orangutan habitat in the Sabangau Forest, Central Kalimantan, Indonesia



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*Cover image: Gracia and new infant Gara in the Sabangau Forest*

*Photo by: Pau Bruges Sintes/BNF/UPT LLG-CIMTROP*



## Introduction

The 600,000 hectare Sabangau Forest in Central Kalimantan, Indonesia, is the largest non-fragmented area of lowland rainforest remaining in Borneo and is of major conservation importance for its high biodiversity; as a globally-significant carbon store; and for its natural resource functions that benefit the surrounding communities.

Sabangau supports the largest extant population of the Bornean orangutan with 6,900 individuals estimated to occur here. This represents 12.5% of the estimated remaining world population of this endangered species. Sabangau is considered one of the last strongholds for the Bornean orangutan and one of the top priority sites for its conservation. In 1994 the Natural Laboratory of Peat-Swamp Forest (*Laboratorium Alam Hutan Gambut: LAHG*) was created to protect and study this unique ecosystem, and in 2004 the Sabangau National Park was declared to conserve this biodiversity.

Despite its protected status, Sabangau is at serious risk from a number of threats, including forest fires, timber-cutting,

encroachment and hunting of endangered wildlife. We are tackling these problems with a community-based approach. A Community Patrol Team, made up of young, committed men from the nearby village of Kereng Bangkirai, patrol the waterways and forest in northern Sabangau to prevent illegal activities and check for fires; socialising with forest users and meeting them in their homes and coordinating with the authorities as necessary.

Working with the Community Patrol Team, we are also restoring the natural hydrology of Sabangau's peat-swamp through building dams to block the man-made canals. Thus, retaining water and forest litter-fall in the ecosystem, slowing drainage and allowing the canals to fill in naturally to prevent further forest fire events.

In this report we give an update on Community Patrol Team activities between April and June 2017, including routine forest patrols and progress on building dams to restore the peatland hydrology.

*Image on previous page: Sabangau peat-swamp forest.*

*Photo by Bernat Ripoll Capilla/BNF/UPT LLG-CIMTROP*

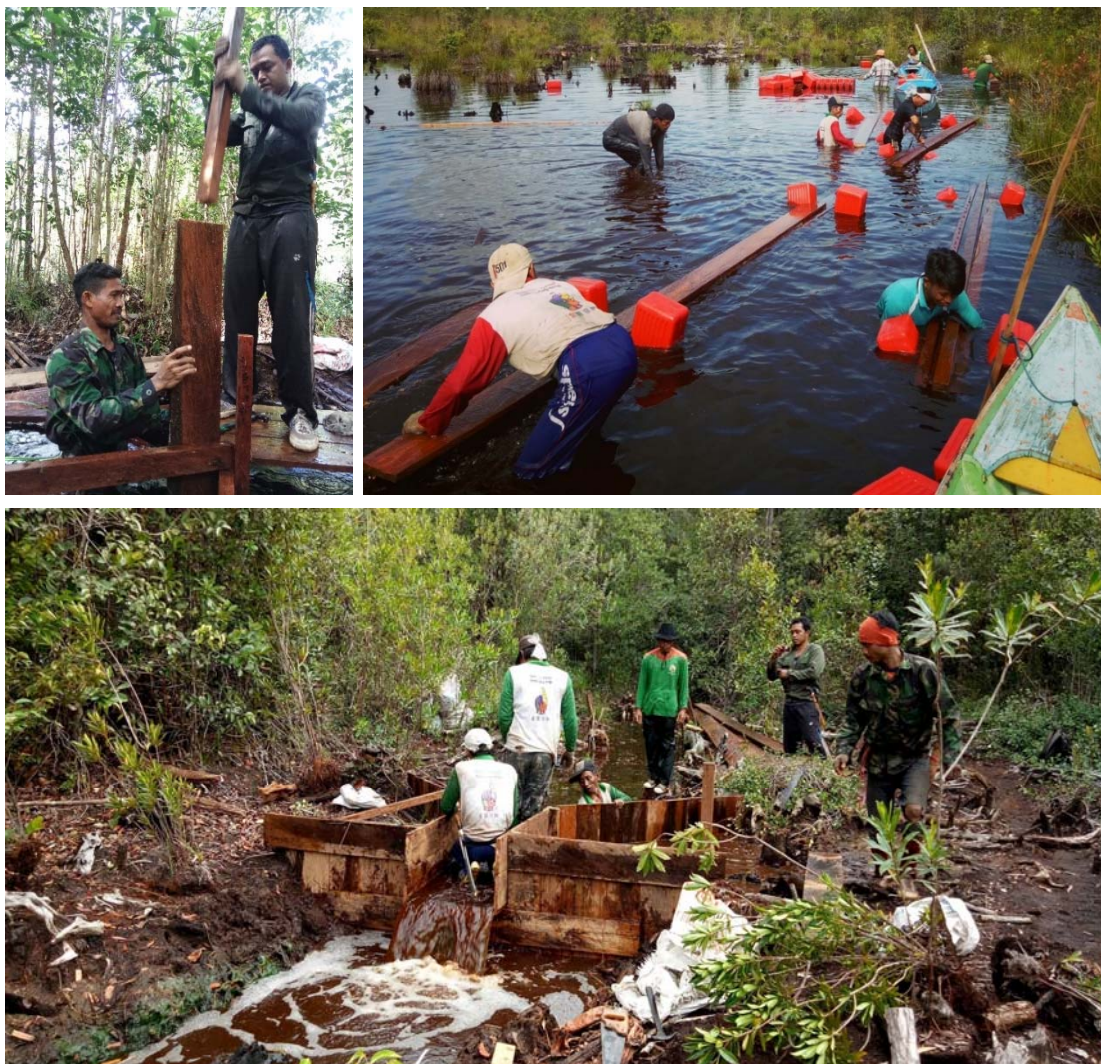
## Orangutan Habitat Restoration

The Community Patrol Team have been very busy recently, taking advantage of the optimum water levels for transporting wood to the canals and building dams. Since April 2017, the team have built a total of 74 dams, more than constructed in the whole of 2016 (71).

These dams were built in four canals: Canal Ujau (20 dams), Canal Yali (24 dams), Canal Jumri (25 dams) and Canal Kartika (5 dams). The construction work was led by the Community Patrol Team, with the assistance of ten members of the local community, who worked hard to build, on average, two dams per day. The team are now transporting more wood to the

forest to build a further 34 dams during July.

The process of dam building is dependent on the water levels in the canals: while high water levels facilitate transportation of the wood and materials to the dam site, actual construction of the canals is more effective when the water levels are a bit lower. Conversely, if the levels drop too far, accessing the furthest parts of the canal deep in the forest can be challenging. We are very proud of the team for working so hard during this short window of opportunity, to help restore this critical orangutan habitat.



*Images by Marta Bina/BNF/UPT LLG-CIMTROP*

## Patrolling the Sabangau Forest

Forest and river patrols by the Community Patrol Team are carried out on a minimum of 18 days per month. The routine patrols have been very successful this quarter, with only one instance of illegal activity (bird hunting) found during this time.

The presence of the Patrol Team in the Sabangau area acts as a deterrent to any illegal activities and helps remind the local community of our conservation work in this important forest. Upon detection of illegal activities being conducted in the area, the Community Patrol Team will first explain that their activities are illegal and provide a warning and any relevant advice.

As the dry season quickly approaches, we are more alert than ever to the possibility of forest fires in the region. The quick response of the Community Patrol Team at the first report of fire in the forest is often essential in getting the fire under control and preventing its spread to the surrounding farmland and forest.



*Idrus from the Community Patrol Team on a routine forest patrol. Image by Marta Bina/BNF/UPT LLG-CIMTROP*



## Thank you

We would like to thank the Orangutan Conservancy for contributing funds towards supporting the work of the Community Patrol Team in the Sabangau Forest.

By working together on the protection and restoration of Sabangau we can ensure this critical population of Borneo orangutans will survive in the future.

We look forward to building on our long-term partnership with the Orangutan Conservancy.



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