

Bornean rangutan
(*Pongo pygmaeus*)
Photo credit: Chiel Bastiaansen

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VISITOR HIGHLIGHTS



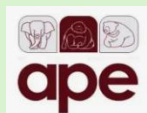
Royal Holloway
University



Winners of Wielkopolska
for Planet 2030
competition (Polish)



Sabah Wildlife Junior
Rangers



Ape Malaysia –
American Visitors



IN THIS ISSUE

PTY introductions [Pages 2-4]

UNESCO [Page 5]

Royal Holloway Visit [Page 6]

Winners of Wielkopolska for Planet
2030 [Page 6]

Sabah Wildlife Juniors [Page 7]

Ape Malaysia [Page 7]

PTY Point of View [Page 8-9]

Danau Girang Information [Page 10]

Introduction to the new Professional Training Year Students (PTYs)



Megan - University of Aberystwyth

Hi, I'm Megan and I study zoology at University of Aberystwyth. I was beyond excited when I found out I'd been accepted as PTY at DGFC, the idea of living in the jungle for a year away from everyone was both terrifying and exciting but I already think it's one of the best decisions I've ever made.

Becoming a PTY, I'm aiming to develop my confidence in practical field skills such as camera trapping and animal trapping as well as gaining knowledge identifying common species found in the Kinabatangan and around the field centre. So far, my favourite moments have been spotting my first pangolin (Pin Pin) in a tree, as well as learning bird handling, measuring and releasing.

For my PTY project I would like to explore working with reptiles (either snakes or geckos) to create an estimation of population numbers throughout the Regrow Borneo sites which has yet to be studied. I will also be continuing data collection for the Regrow Borneo butterfly project this year taking over from previous PTYs in order to explore how butterfly populations vary in plantation, new forest sites and natural forest.

I'm enjoying learning many new board games such as carom and mahjong, as well as joining the army of people now learning to juggle at DGFC (Ollie's fault). I look forward to the coming months, continuing to build confidence in my field skills and learning to lead my own projects.



Rufous-backed dwarf kingfisher – *Ceyx rufidorsa*



Orang utan - *Pongo pygmaeus*



Photos taken by Hannah



Wanderer – *Pareronia valeria*



5:30am Sunrise over the Kinabatangan

Hannah – University of Kent

Hi! My name is Hannah, and I am a Biomedical student from the University of Kent. Taking a leap out of my comfort zone by choosing to move across the world for a placement was a whirlwind experience, but one I wouldn't change for the world.

My degree isn't the usual pickings for this placement; however, I wanted to explore the research cycle of how the field work goes into the laboratory and analysis side. I've always had an interest in wildlife and being able to mix my passion for studying diseases with potential threats to wildlife and humans, I had to jump at the chance. So far in just two months I have experienced many once in a lifetime opportunities already; from seeing endangered and rare species at an arm's length away, to collecting biological samples from one of our pangolins to working and meeting with some of the smartest people in the field.

I believe I have become a lot more confident in who I am and have been loving how caring and family like everyone is, almost feels like a second home already. I'm really enjoying the excitement of each day not being the same. For my PTY project, I would like to explore the prevalence and diversity of the ectoparasites in birds within the Kinabatangan. Investigating their roles of transmission and infection, maybe getting some endoparasites also! I'm looking forward to gaining more experience and skills from my time here at DGFC!! Including creative skills such as juggling, handstands and many more!

Ollie- University of Aberystwyth



Hello, my name is Ollie Hall and I am an ecology student from the heart of Wales (Aberystwyth), however my roots lie in the rolling hills of Devon (southwest of England). Being born and raised on an organic farm I've always had my boots in the muck and my mind on the environment which has directly influenced me to want to help solve some of the issues we have in the world using the oldest and richest library we have access to, the biosphere.

Therefore, discovering it was a possibility to spend a year immersed in one of the most biodiverse ecosystems in the world, seemed like a dream and waking up every day in the jungle is nothing short of that! Pesky pigeons have been replaced by mischievous macaques, and the dawn chorus is no longer filled with chirps from wrens and robins but squawks from horn bills and the melodic whistle of the hill minor. Like the surrounding ecosystem DGFC is a vibrant community filled with local legends, researchers from across Malaysia and even a few orang putih (white man) like myself and I couldn't be happier to be a part of the team!

As an ecologist in training, I study the organism and their interactions between each other with the latter being the area I'm most interested in, which is one of the many reasons why fungi has inoculated my brain. From the ability to break complex hydrocarbon bonds found in plastics, crude oils, pesticides and fertilizers to sustaining 80-90% of higher plants with nutrients they otherwise couldn't access via mycorrhizal relationships. Fungi (in my opinion) is our ticket to a healthy planet! While at DGFC I plan to look at how the ratio of saprophytic and mycorrhizal fungi differ in Regrow Borneo sites as well as comparing the substrate I find the fruiting bodies on. I'm also excited to continue the butterfly diversity project with Megan and improve my invertebrate ID skills.

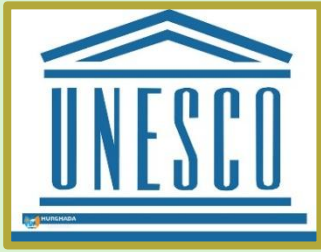


Cookeina speciosa



Dogs Vomit slime mould - *Fuligo septica*

See you in the Fungal Future, Ollie.



The Kinabatangan becoming a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve

What is UNESCO?

UNESCO stands for the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation. Established in 1945 with the mission to contribute peace and security by promoting collaboration along nations.

On the 27th of September 2025, during the 37th meeting of the international coordinating council of the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) the Kinabatangan was officially recognised as a Biosphere Reserve! Joining 785 other biospheres from 142 countries, this is a title which internationally recognises areas with exceptional biodiversity; with Sir David Attenborough himself exclaiming that the Kinabatangan is “The single most important piece of rainforest on Earth” there’s no surprise that Sabah has gained its second biosphere reserve (after the Crocker Range).

What is a Biosphere Reserve?

A biosphere can be described as ‘learning places for sustainable development’ where global issues have local solutions. Therefore, the Biosphere Reserve not only brings further protection to the biodiversity of Sabah, but it also helps restore the equilibrium between people and the ecosystems they rely on by managing and understanding the interactions between social and ecological systems.

Kinabatangan ecotourism is supported and benefited by the local community. It will also encourage education, monitoring and research which is at the heart of this initiative. The latter hopefully being an opportunity for the Danau Girang Field Centre to gain more funding and grants to help us not only continue but expand our research in an area which is now officially internationally recognised for high biodiversity.



Ape Malaysia 6am River cruise. Photo credit: Chiel Bastiaansen

The 3 Zones of a Biosphere Reserve

Core - totally protected area where research and monitoring is concentrated, this zone also acts as a reference point for the health of the ecosystem which may be used to assess the sustainability of activities in the reserve.

Buffer zone- Surrounding the core and may be an area where agriculture, education, reforestation, tourism and leisure activities are undertaken. However, these activities must help to protect and raise awareness of biodiversity rather than hinder it.

Transition area- The outermost zone of the biosphere where the majority of people live and work. In this zone co-operation from everyone in the community in social, economic and ecologically sustainable activities is the main driver for long term sustainability.



Figure 1: UNESCO / delhambre
Technical guidelines for biosphere reserves. UNESCO, 2022

Visitors in September and October



Royal Holloway

We had the chance to welcome back Royal Holloway, University of London, to DGFC. Their 10-day adventure (10th - 20th Sept) started with primate watching on the boats, seeing an array of macaques, proboscis monkeys and much more. Followed by bird boats and night walks, exploring the nocturnal side of DGFC, such as jumping spiders, white lipped frogs and sleeping kingfishers. The students also assisted in mist netting, measuring and analysing the birds with Ray (Research Assistant), and identifying species such as the white-crown shama and a chestnut-winged babbler.

Additionally, the students had the opportunity to hear about the ongoing PhD research projects, such as Rhiannon's presentation on sun bear genetics, Maz's Regrow Borneo project and Amanda's project on the spatial ecology of small cats in the Kinabatangan. Finally, throughout their time here, the students also had their own mini projects to collect data on. Some honourable mentions include the observations of grooming within primates at different times of the day and the delayed flight of female hornbills.

Winners of Wielkopolska for Planet 2030 competition

From the 20th – 27th September we had the joy of hosting the winners of Wielkopolska for Planet 2030 competition in which they won a weeklong stay with us. The winners who were from a variety of academic backgrounds (chemist, forestry and aquatic botany) shadowed our ongoing projects learning how we undertake activities at DGFC.

Over the week, the group undertook mist netting, cat tracking and pangolin tracking in which they were a great help with bird identification and even managed to successfully find both of our pangolins we are currently tracking! As well as presentations from some of our researchers, Maz and Amanda. The group also presented their prize-winning projects to us! Their last day included a trip to Batangan ridge, a limestone hill, where they explored bat caves at the base and the views after hiking up the hill.

Down time at the field centre included lots of competitive volleyball in which the group, our field assistants and PTYs all joined in.

It was a pleasure hosting the winners of Wielkopolska for Planet 2030 competition for the 2nd year and meeting some of the bright minds shaping their respective fields. We're sure they will continue to do great things and look forward to seeing what they do next!



Sabah Wildlife Junior Rangers

From Friday 10th to Sunday 12th October, we had the pleasure of educating and entertaining the next generation of Sabah's biodiversity protectors, the Junior Wildlife Rangers from SMK St Michael, Sandakan!

On Saturday, this group of students (aged 13-18) were joined by Puan Sylvia Alisto, who is not only the District Officer for the Kinabatangan at the Sabah Wildlife Department, but she is also responsible for establishing the junior wildlife ranger program. Therefore, to have Sylvia at the field centre giving a presentation to the wildlife rangers was not just a benefit to the students but also a celebration of the impact DGFC has had on the surrounding community.



To teach the students how we track animals, like the pangolin and the leopard cat, we gave the students the VHF trackers and taught them how to use them. Guiding them to find a stuffed monkey we had hidden in the forest. After this, they got their hands dirty by planting some trees down by the jetty while one of our resident orangutans watched over them. The jungle must have known how important these guests were, as four other primate species, a flock of 50+ Asian black hornbills and a few monster crocodiles came out on their afternoon boat cruise.

We were absolutely blown away by the passion, dedication and respect that this group showed towards each other, our staff and most importantly, the natural world! The future of Sabah's wildlife is in good hands!

Ape Malaysia – American Visitors

From 13th -15th October DGFC welcomed Ape Malaysia, visitors from across the US, with their knowledgeable guides for a short stay at the centre.

Our guests came from many different states of the USA including Colorado, California and Missouri, bringing together a wonderful mix of zoologists, vets, a wildlife artist and even a magician!

During their stay, the group joined our team for boat cruises along the Kinabatangan River, and morning and night forest walks led by the PTYs and field assistants, where they spotted crocodiles, pig-tailed macaques, and the white-crowned hornbill.

To top off their stay, the group enjoyed presentations on our ongoing research projects, and a truly magical finale with a brilliant magic show by Auggie, where he DIY'd a show from objects around the Main Building!

It was a pleasure hosting Ape Malaysia as they brought such great energy, curiosity, and laughter to the forest.



PTY Point of View

See the Jungle through our lenses



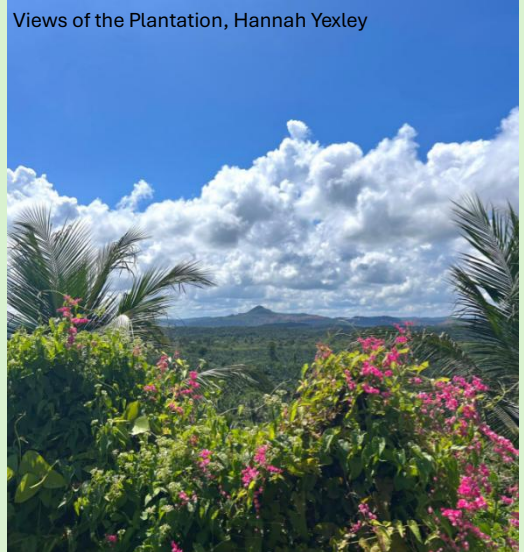
6am Boat Cruise, Chiel Bastiaansen



Fluted birds nest - *Cyathus striatus*, Ollie Hall



North Bornean gray gibbon - *Hylobates funereus*, Chiel Bastiaansen



Views of the Plantation, Hannah Yexley



Horsfield's baron - *Tanaecia japis*, Megan Rees

Creature Feature

Pictured by Ollie Hall, the Borneo forest scorpion (*Heterometrus longimanus*) compared to a Garmin 64 GPS (15.5cm) in UV light.



Pig-Tailed Macaque - *Macaca nemestrina*, Chiel Bastiaansen



Milky Way from the jetty, Chiel Bastiaansen

Hygrocybe sp possibly a *Gloioxanthomyces*, Ollie Hall



Saltwater crocodile – *Crocodylus porosus*, Chiel Bastiaansen



Mangrove snake - *Boiga dendrophila*, Chiel Bastiaansen



Mycena roseilignicola, Ollie Hall



Crab-eating frog - *Fejervarya cancrivora*,
Chiel Bastiaansen



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