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MEET THE PTYS

ALICJA

Hi everyone!
I'm Alicja, an undergraduate studying Biological Sciences (Zoology) at Cardiff University.

Having previously studied a BTEC in Animal Management, I discovered that I learn best through hands-on experience rather than sitting in a classroom. So, when I heard about the opportunity to take my learning into the field, I knew it was something I wanted to pursue.

Even so, coming here was a huge step outside my comfort zone. Having grown up in Poland and now living in the UK, I had never travelled beyond the two. Taking on this placement was an opportunity not only to develop my knowledge and practical skills, but also to challenge myself by experiencing a new environment.

Over the last two months, I've already begun to learn so much, both about the wonderful wildlife here in the Kinabatangan and also about myself. Growing in confidence has been a highlight of my experience so far, and I'm excited to look back on far we all come as we share our experiences, challenges and growth with you all throughout the year.

For my PTY project, I hope to study owls, one of my favourite animals. Found in every continent, except Antartica, these magnificent birds swallow their prey whole and regurgitate the undigestible matter as pellets. It is this process in particular that I would be keen to utilise; by collecting pellets I would be able to investigate what the owls of the Kinabatangan have been getting their talons into.

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HANNAH

iHi! I'm Hannah, I'm currently doing my Masters degree with a placement year in Wildlife Conservation at the University of Chester. After doing my undergraduate degree in Biology at Aberystwyth University, I realised I wanted to focus on working in the conservation sector whilst gaining invaluable practical experience that comes from working in the field every day.

During the first year of my Masters degree I got to study all sorts of amazing things from conservation genetics to the investigative techniques behind solving wildlife crime, but my favourite by far was the field research techniques where I learnt so many practical skills and conducted my own research project comparing camera traps to point counts to identify lizard interactions with food resources for the quantification of pollination and seed dispersal.

Personally, I love mammals, especially carnivores. I would be over the moon to see some yellow throated martens or a binturong this year especially given how elusive they are. For this year I am most excited to get involved with everyone's research and gain as many skills as possible to be able to apply these skills to my own research here at Danau Girang, and elsewhere in the world wherever it is needed.

SAM

Hello DGFC enthusiasts, I'm Sam, a Cardiff University undergrad student with a love for genetics and all things wildlife.

I've always enjoyed the philosophy shared by legendary culinary storyteller Anthony Bourdain, "If I'm an advocate for anything it is to move. As far as you can, as much as you can. Across the ocean or across the river". I feel 7000 miles is enough movement to really see and enjoy a different type of life and to gain experiences I never could have if DGFC and Benoit hadn't so graciously given me the opportunity to do so.

I aim to grow as much as possible as a scientist during my time here, fortunately I am in the company of many devoted researchers all with a shared common goal, save what has already suffered so much. From the icons such as the orangutans to the very trees they swing on, there is so much work to be done to conserve this islands natural beauty and I'm very excited to get to play a small role in that fight. Alongside my personal project I will also be continuing the years long data collection for the butterfly project, a dive into butterfly populations across plantations and newly reforested sites.

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NISHA

Hello beautiful people! I'm Nisha, an Aberystwyth student currently doing my undergrad in environmental science. Being a PTY has already taught me so much about the pragmatic, realistic applications of conservation, and I'm beyond excited to continue learning.

I am completely fascinated with the Sunda pangolin – the pangolin has had my heart since age 10, and having the opportunity to be part of working towards the conservation of such a beautiful creature is already something I wouldn't trade for anything, even being the most minuscule cog in the works is incredible. To continue working with these elusive mammals as my PTY project would be nothing short of 'the dream'.

My favourite memories at DG so far have been hearing the gibbons great call over Kaboi lake in the early hours of the morning and, consequentially, getting to see the sunrise break through the canopy while sitting isolated in the jungle. Undeniably though, nothing beats the first pangolin sighting – being woken up and allowed to watch the retagging and release of Galak (our lovely long-term resident) is something I will never forget.

Unsurprisingly to all reading – the contagious passion in DG makes everyday a ball (pangolin joke).

ROYAL HOLLOWAY

On the 11th September, we welcomed seventeen students and two lecturers from Royal Holloway University - guiding them through research methods, protocols and reforesting activities. Together, we planted 64 *Mallotus* saplings in the Sungai Pin active reforestation site in a single session.

They conducted group projects over the 10-day period, including vigilance in long-tailed macaques, grooming behaviour in long-tailed macaques and proboscis monkeys, and correlations between size and reaction to anthropogenic distraction in salt water crocodiles. Throughout the course, Royal Holloway practiced field research methodologies like mist netting, pangolin tracking and night/morning surveys.



Royal Holloway enjoying their final dinner with us

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WOOP WOOP, THAT'S THE SOUND OF THE ... GIBBON

We are pleased to welcome back Chiel Bastiaansen, who is returning after 7 months to collect field data for his bachelor's thesis. He will be with us for 5 months researching the canopy structural characteristics of the North Bornean gibbon occurrence.

The North Bornean gibbon is one of 4 species on the island of Borneo, and one of 2 ape species in Sabah. This elusive species is endangered according to the IUCN Red List, with sightings along the Kinabatangan being extremely rare. They are predominantly canopy-dwelling, rarely seen on the forest floor - making them vulnerable to fragmentation within the Kinabatangan floodplain.

Whilst sightings are rare, their territorial morning calls are often heard between 5 and 9am. The calls are sex-specific, with females emitting a great call - A distinctive sequence of 'whoops' which increase in frequency, which can be heard from kilometers away!



Chiel doing his auditory triangulation fieldwork

Chiel's fieldwork involves the use of both passive and active acoustic survey methods to map presence and locate the exact locations of gibbons. Firstly utilizing audiomoths to establish detection and non-detection, and using this data to select sites for active acoustic surveys using triangulation. The triangulation data is then used for UAV surveys mapping the canopy structural characteristics of the detection and non-detection areas, which will be extracted from the Digital Elevation Models (DEM) generated from the UAV derived imagery.

This project aims to give an insight into habitat preferences of the North Bornean gibbon in the fragmented landscapes of the Lower Kinabatangan Floodplain.

Fun fact: Locally, these elusive apes are colloquially called 'wakwaks'.



North Bornean gibbon hanging from a tree at Bukit Mansuli
Photo Credit: Chiel Bastiaansen

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DOM'S VISIT

Joining the PTYs for their first two weeks in DG was Dominique Autier-Derian, a veterinarian from France, specialised in animal behaviour and welfare, recently working on ethical reflections around lynx in distress management in France. Visiting us as an intern for her degree in free wildlife health and welfare, Dominique followed fieldwork regarding wild cats, the Malayan civet and the pangolin. Domi was an absolute pleasure to have around - her infectious passion and love for the DG lifestyle will be hugely missed.



Dom cat tracking for Amanda's project

INTRODUCING OLLIE

Hello everyone, I'm Ollie, and I will be volunteering here for the next six months. Having recently finished my master's in Biological Sciences at Cardiff University, studying the population genetics of Asian water monitor lizards from this very place, I knew this was a natural next step in continuing my pursuit of an academic career that contributes to the conservation of the many beautiful ecosystems that dominate our planet.

This was strengthened by the fact that I visited DGFC for two weeks as part of the Cardiff University field course in 2024, during which I instantly fell in love with the jungle and all of the wildlife within it. Two weeks was not enough time for me, so I knew I had to come back for longer once I had finished my degree, and I am so grateful to be given the opportunity to do so. Over the next six months, I hope to help as much as possible with the ongoing research projects, create opportunities for myself in the future, and connect with so many like-minded people who are all dedicated to one goal: conserving this amazing ecosystem that we at DGFC are so lucky to call home.



Ollie, Chiel, Hannah and Zul returning from the final day of gibbon triangulation fieldwork

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LINKED BY ETHICAL BRIDGE



Julieta arriving at DGFC

In early September, we had the pleasure of hosting the charming Julieta Castineira de Dios. She brings 13 years of experience working in law, international development, and justice and now focuses on supporting ecotourism and the non-profit sector. Most importantly, Julieta is the Founder and Executive Officer of both Ethical Bridge and its partner NGO, Local Impact Alliance.

Ethical Bridge operates as a global hub discovery platform, connecting purpose-driven people with grassroots organisations worldwide to fulfil volunteering and job roles as well as shed light on these smaller organisations. By putting these lesser-known initiatives right on an interactive map, it helps guide ecotourism toward places that are often far more ethically conscious when it comes to wildlife and animal well-being. Ultimately to direct vital funding and support straight to the communities that need it the most, breaking us out of the exhausting cycle of chasing whatever travel spot happens to be trendy.

When interviewed on what motivated her to begin this journey, Julieta said she was driven by childhood values centered on "always protecting being vulnerable... people, communities, animals, whatever that needs protection". Her vast travel experience across the globe allowed her to witness injustice that remained outside the courtroom, leading her to the core belief that "the people closest to a challenge should remain closest to the decisions, resources and recognition that shape its solution". As part of experiencing and championing this grassroots impact firsthand, Julieta visited us and immersed herself in our conservation efforts.

WIELKOPOLSKA AWARD

In early September we were visited by the winners of the Wielkopolska For The Planet 2030 award. The annual prize is awarded by the Marshal of the Wielkopolska region for climate innovations aligning with 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development passed by the UN. They participated in an international exchange visiting us and later Universiti Malaysia Sabah to present their research. While experiencing life at DG we also celebrated a 30th Birthday!


Karolina celebrating her birthday

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SPECIES HIGHLIGHT: SUNDA FLYING LEMUR



Photo Credit: Chiel Bastiaansen

The Sunda flying lemur (*Galeopterus variegatus*), also known as a colugo, is in fact not a lemur at all, and cannot fly. It belongs to the order Dermoptera and family Cynocephalidae, as one of only two known species, both found in South East Asia. The species uses a membrane known as a patagium that spans from the neck, extending between the limbs, which allows it to glide over a distance of 100 meters while losing less than 10 meters in elevation. The Sunda flying lemur is primarily nocturnal and strictly arboreal, foraging in tree canopies for leaves, buds, shoots, and some fruits. Genetic evidence has suggested that the colugos may be a sister group to primates, meaning it would be the closest living non-primate relative to primates (us!).

The order name of Dermoptera comes from the Ancient Greek words ‘derma’, meaning skin, and ‘pterón’, meaning wing. The family name; Cynocephalidae, means ‘having a head like a dog’ due to the species’ long snout and broad flat skull. Some of us were lucky enough to see a Sunda flying lemur in October just in time for this issue.

JUNGLE READY!

To best prepare us for whatever the jungle might throw at us, we took part in a three-day First Aid and Search and Rescue training course led by our friends Joe and Chris from FieldSkills. Other members of the team also joined us to complete their refresher training.

Over the three days, we covered a whole range of skills, including CPR, using an AED, and how to treat everything from sprains, cuts and breaks to burns and bites. We also learnt about common tropical diseases, allergies and emergency response protocols.

Of course, it wasn't all classroom learning! We also got stuck into some practical search and rescue exercises, including the rather interesting challenge of rescuing an ‘injured’ field assistant from the jungle using a stretcher!

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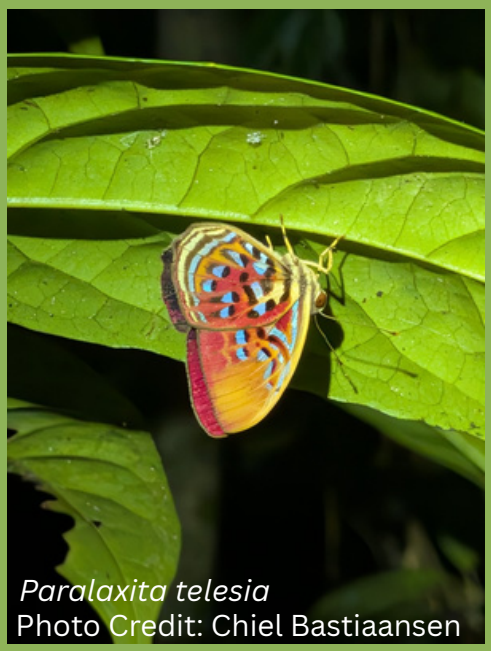
PHOTO HIGHLIGHTS



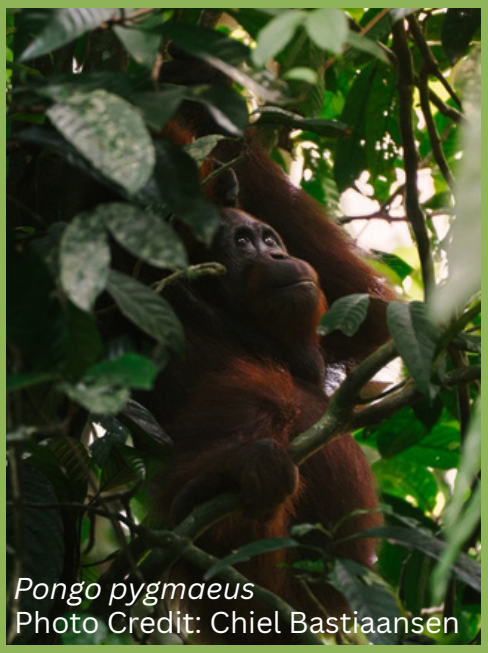
Paralaxita telesia
Photo Credit: Chiel Bastiaansen



Spilornis cheela
Photo Credit: Chiel Bastiaansen



Oligodon octolineatus
Photo Credit: Chiel Bastiaansen



Pongo pygmaeus
Photo Credit: Chiel Bastiaansen



Pyrops cultellatus
Photo Credit: Chiel Bastiaansen



Theraphosidae
Photo Credit: Chiel Bastiaansen

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PHOTO HIGHLIGHTS



Macaca fascicularis
Photo Credit: Hannah Williams



Parthenos sylvia
Photo Credit: Alicja Fijak



Pongo pygmaeus
Photo Credit: Hannah Williams



Sunset at the jetty
Photo Credit: Alicja Fijak



Elephas maximus borneensis
Photo Credit: Hannah Williams



Elephas maximus borneensis
Photo Credit: Alicja Fijak

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