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BOS Foundation Conducts Back-to-back Orangutan Releases in Central and East Kalimantan

In collaboration with the Central and East Kalimantan Natural Resources Conservation Agencies (BKSDA), the Borneo Orangutan Survival (BOS) Foundation has released 10 orangutans from its two rehabilitation centres: Nyaru Menteng in Central Kalimantan and Samboja Lestari in East Kalimantan. The release in Central Kalimantan took place in the Bukit Batikap Protection Forest, while the release in East Kalimantan took place in the Kehje Sewen Ecosystem Restoration Concession.

For their biggest operation yet in 2021, the BOS Foundation, together with the Central and East Kalimantan BKSDA, has carried back-to-back orangutan releases utilising helicopter transport, in Central and East Kalimantan. The release in Central Kalimantan reintroduced seven rehabilitated orangutans from the Nyaru Menteng Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre to the Bukit Batikap Protection Forest, in the Murung Raya Regency. Meanwhile, the release in East Kalimantan involved three orangutans from the Samboja Lestari Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre being released in the Kehje Sewen Forest in the East Kutai Regency.

The release in Central Kalimantan was conducted first, on 16 February and involved five male and two female orangutans, including one mother-offspring pair. From Nyaru Menteng, the orangutans were transported by car to the city of Kuala Kurun in the Gunung Mas Regency, where a helicopter, chartered from Hevilift, was waiting. The orangutans were then flown directly from the Kuala Kurun Airport to release points in the heart of the Bukit Batikap Protection Forest.

HANDI NASOKA, S.HUT., Acting Head of the Central Kalimantan Natural Resources Conservation Agency (BKSDA), welcomed the release: “Efforts to help curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus have hampered many conservation-related activities, especially in Central Kalimantan. I warmly welcome the initiative from our colleagues at the BOS Foundation, who have managed to implement new protocols and procedures to help curb the spread of COVID-19, for the sake of both the community and wildlife, while continuing to carry out important conservation work. We at the Central Kalimantan BKSDA are committed to upholding conservation efforts, even as the pandemic persists.”

The Bukit Batikap Protection Forest in the Murung Raya Regency is located far from the Nyaru Menteng Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre; it usually takes three days and two nights to reach the camp by car and boat. Therefore, the option of using air transport that significantly cuts travel time and the need to cross human settlements was welcomed by the team.

One of the orangutans released was Nenuah, a 19-year-old female who was repatriated from Thailand. Nenuah came to Nyaru Menteng in 2006, along with 47 other individuals. Prior to Nenuah’s release, only 6 other individuals from this group of 48 had made it all the way through rehabilitation and were released in a forest. The rest have unfortunately experienced difficulty in developing the natural skills and behaviours required to qualify for release, as a result of lengthy captivity during earlier years.

The release in East Kalimantan was carried out immediately after the one in Central Kalimantan. From the Samboja Lestari Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre, a team from PT. Rehabilitasi Habitat Orangutan Indonesia (RHOI) transported three orangutans - two males and one female, aged between 21-28 years

PRESS RELEASE

- to Juq Kehje Swen Island in Muara Wahau, East Kutai. From there, the same helicopter waited to take the orangutans directly to the release point on the northern side of the Kehje Sewen Forest.

IR. SUNANDAR TRIGUNAJASA N., M.M., Head of the East Kalimantan Natural Resources Conservation Agency (BKSDA), said: “The government has gone to great lengths to prevent the spread of COVID-19, not only amongst human communities, but also amongst wildlife that is subject to biodiversity conservation activities. The implementation of these policies has been carried out with the aim of not only protecting animals under the care of humans at conservation facilities from the threat of this coronavirus, but also the wild populations. We are grateful that we were able to continue our work together with our colleagues at the BOS Foundation by developing protocols that allow the rehabilitation process to carry on while still reducing the risk for COVID-19 spread in orangutan conservation activities. We cannot afford to stop our work in under any circumstance. What we must do is keep on innovating and adapting to the dynamic conditions and moving forward.”

DR. IR. JAMARTIN SIHITE, BOS Foundation CEO, said: “For an entire year, we have not been able to release orangutans due to the global pandemic, but we are still strongly committed to the orangutan conservation effort. We have taken advantage of this one-year gap to rewrite and finalise a new set of protocols for implementing activities in the midst of a pandemic, which allow us to continue saving orangutans. We conduct regular tests on staff to ensure that those who interact with orangutans are safe from COVID-19, as well as ensure the orangutans released from our rehabilitation centres are also healthy and free of the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

“We have implemented strict health protocols, and introduced mitigation plans to be enacted in the event of an orangutan contracting to the virus. Furthermore, the use of a helicopter for these orangutan releases also helps reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19. We are relieved that the procedures we have implemented to date have worked well, but we continue to hope that we all can overcome this pandemic. We will continue to strive to prevent the transmission of the virus that causes COVID-19 to orangutans, both those we care for and those who live freely in the wild.”

To ensure a successful conservation effort that involves all stakeholders, the BOS Foundation continues to work closely with the Government of Indonesia at all levels, and would like to express appreciation in particular for the contributions of the Ministry of Environment and Forestry; the Central and East Kalimantan BKSDA offices; the provincial governments of Central and East Kalimantan; and the regional governments and communities of the Murung Raya, Kutai Kartanegara, and East Kutai regencies.

The BOS Foundation would also like to acknowledge the invaluable support of our official global partner organisations (BOS Australia, BOS Germany, BOS Switzerland, BOS UK, and Save the Orangutan), Orangutan Outreach, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, PT. First State Investments Indonesia, Citibank N.A. Indonesia, private-sector supporters like PT. SSMS and PT. NAS, the Kuala Kurun Airport, Hevilift, other conservation organisations, and individual supporters from around the globe who contribute significantly to our work and nature conservation efforts in Indonesia.

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PRESS RELEASE



EDITOR'S NOTE:

About BOS Foundation

Founded in 1991, the BOS Foundation is a non-profit Indonesian organisation dedicated to the conservation of Bornean orangutans and their natural habitats, working together with local communities, the Ministry of Environment and Forestry of the Republic of Indonesia, and international partner organisations.

Alongside a range of other activities that include ecosystem restoration and community development and education interventions, the BOS Foundation currently cares for more than 400 orangutans across two orangutan rehabilitation centres, with the support of 400 highly dedicated staff members and experts in the fields of primatology, biodiversity, ecology, forest rehabilitation, agroforestry, community empowerment, communications, education, and orangutan welfare. For further information, please visit www.orangutan.or.id.

About PT. RHOI

PT. Restorasi Habitat Orangutan Indonesia (RHOI) is a company that was established by the BOS Foundation on 21 April 2009, solely to acquire a Utilisation of Forest Timber Products through a Restoration of Ecosystem Licence (IUPHHK-RE), also known as an Ecosystem Restoration Concession (ERC).

As a non-profit organisation, the BOS Foundation is not permitted to apply for certain licences due to government regulations. Hence, RHOI was established. The permit gives RHOI the authority to manage a concession area - in this case, a forest area – which is imperative in the planning and implementation of orangutan releases.

On 18 August 2010, RHOI was issued an ERC permit by the Ministry of Forestry, for an 86,593.65-hectare section of rainforest in East Kutai Regency, East Kalimantan. This ERC provides a suitable, protected, and sustainable habitat for orangutans for at least 60 years, with the option of extending for another 35 years. The funding to purchase the permit, which cost around USD 1.4 million, was received from donors and the BOS Foundation's global partner organisations in Europe and Australia.

The forest's name, 'Kehje Sewen', translates as 'forest for orangutans' in local Dayak Wehea language. By name and nature, the Kehje Sewen Forest has become a forest for orangutans. For further information, please visit <http://theforestforever.com/>

About Orangutan Releases

Since 2012, the BOS Foundation has released 478 orangutans into two release sites in Central Kalimantan (Bukit Batikap Protection Forest and Bukit Baka Bukit Raya National Park) and one in East Kalimantan (Kehje Sewen Forest).

This is the 36th release conducted by the BOS Foundation in Central Kalimantan, and the 24th in East Kalimantan. These releases take the total population of released orangutans in the Bukit Batikap Protection Forest to 190, and in the Kehje Sewen Forest to 121 individuals.