



THE LURE OF TROPICAL KALIMANTAN

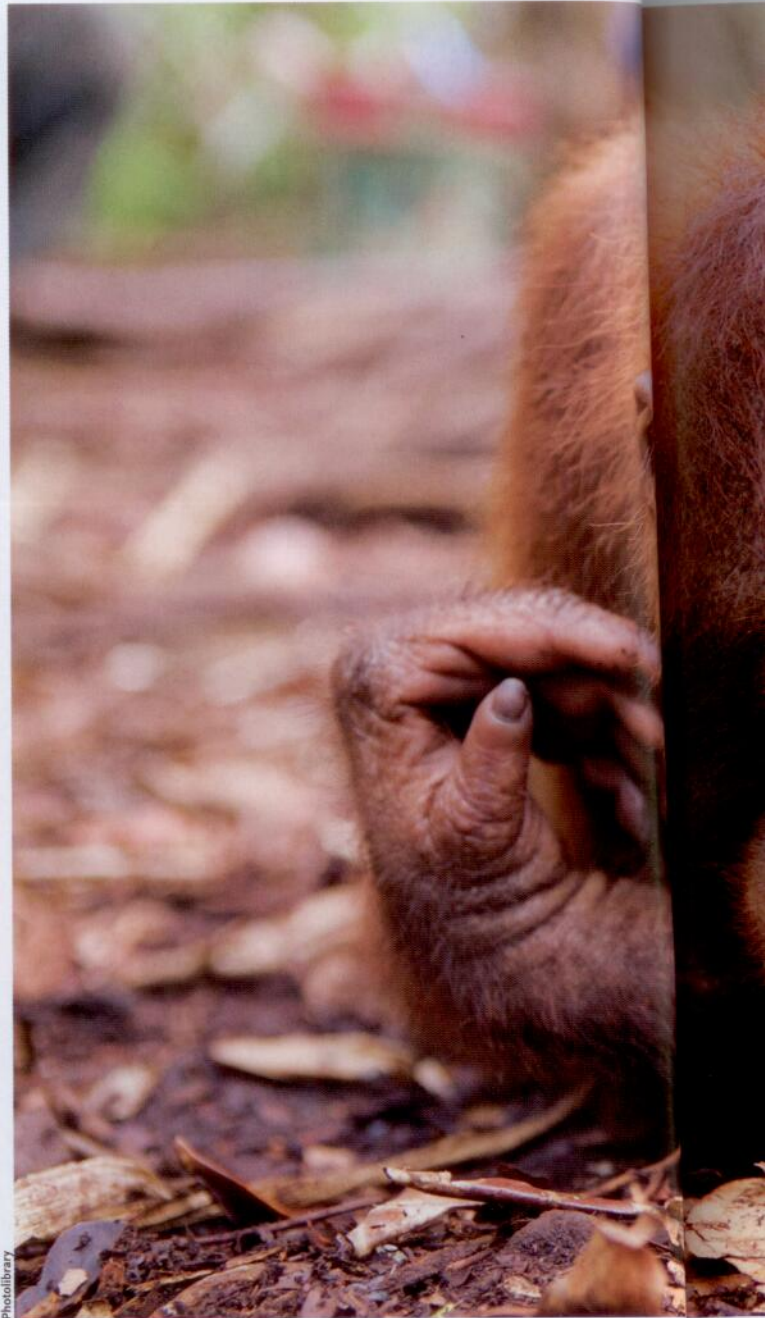
Islam and conservation

► A juvenile Bornean orang-utan (*Pongo pygmaeus*) plays on the forest floor at the Nyaru Menteng Orangutan Reintroduction Project in Central Kalimantan, Indonesia.

Almost 35 years ago, when Dr Birute Galdikas landed in the thick forest of Central Kalimantan, she was somewhat surprised to observe not only the strength in numbers of orang-utans that inhabited the area, but also their startling proximity to the native tribes that have been a feature of the forest for generations. The three major Dayak tribes in Central Kalimantan – the Ngaju, Ot Danum and Dusun Ma'anyan Ot Siang – are extended into several branches of prominent Dayak tribes in Central Kalimantan such as Lawangan, Taboyan, Dusun Siang, Boyan, Bantian, Dohoi and Kodorin.

The famous researcher of orang-utans made her way to the Sekonyer Village, a Muslim settlement in the reserve of Tanjung Putting, to complete her PhD dissertation submitted for the University of California at Los Angeles, USA, and then published in 1984. She wrote, "Orang-utans are numerous in the coastal area of Central Kalimantan where the culture and religion of Islam is rooted very strongly within the community, and where consumption of primate and pig are taboo."

Central Kalimantan is the third largest Indonesian province by area, with a size of 153,800 square kilometres, about 1.5 times the size of the island of Java. It is bordered by West and East Kalimantan provinces to the north, by the Java Sea to the south, by South and East Kalimantan provinces to the east, and by West Kalimantan province to the west.



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TROPICAL KALIMANTAN

The protection of orang-utans in the coastal population and culture of the Malay-Muslim tribes has impressed many conservationists.

The Schwaner Mountains stretch from the northeast of the province to the southwest, 80 percent of which is covered in dense forest, peatland swamps, mangroves, rivers and traditional agricultural land. Highland areas in the northeast are remote and not easily accessible. Non-volcanic mounts are scattered in this area, including Kengkabang, Samiajang, Liang Pahang and Ulu Gedang.

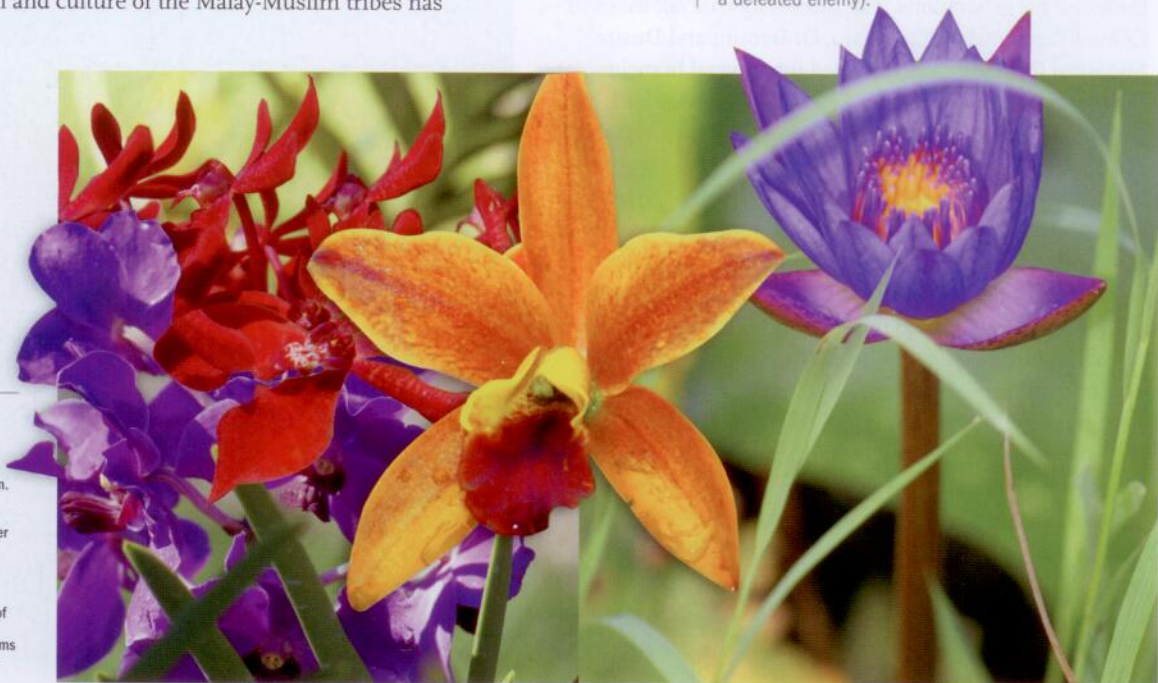
The centre of the province is covered with tropical forest, which produces rattan, resin and valuable timber such as Ulin and Meranti. The southern lowlands are dominated by peatland swamps that intersect with many rivers. Sabangau National Park is a protected peatland area internationally acknowledged as a sanctuary for the endangered orang-utan.

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[DID YOU KNOW?]

Drs Herman Rijkse and Erik Meijaar, authors of the book *Our Vanishing Relative: Status of Wild Orangutans at the Close of the 20th Century*, noted that "the extinction of the orang-utan population in several pockets of tropical forest areas in Sumatra, Java and Kalimantan is caused by poaching."

These apes disappeared from the huge Kapuas River flood plains and the fertile valleys in the area of East Kalimantan, Kayan Mentarang; and in almost all the eastern lowlands of Sumatra, within the Bukit Barisan range. The orang-utan has completely disappeared from mainland Thailand, Malaysia and Java. The reason for the extinction range, according to the two scientists, is partly because of competition to obtain food, and partly due to religious reasons related to the tradition of headhunting, or *ngayau* (beheading a defeated enemy).



► Orchids and lotuses found in the mountainous rainforest of Central Kalimantan.

◄ A boat (*Klotok*) on Sungai Sekonyer in Tanjung Puting National Park.

◄▲ Harvested hibiscus, or Rose of Sharon (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*) blossoms at Pangkalan Bun.



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[INFO]



A *hima* in the Arabian desert.

Reviving the *hima*

More evidence of Islam's conservation prowess, exemplified by Prophet Muhammad, lies in the indigenous areas of the Middle East, which became known as the *hima*. History notes that *himas* come in various sizes, from several acres to hundreds of square kilometres. The Hima al Rabadha, which was built by Caliph Umar ibn Khattab and expanded by Caliph Uthman ibn Affan, is one of the largest and accommodates thousands of livestock. This area has so far become an example of the sustainable livestock grazing practice. In the 1960s, it was estimated that there would be 3,000 *himas* in Saudi Arabia. Because a *hima* is managed locally, management is based on community accord.

In addition to the efforts to preserve nature in the conventional way by setting up national parks or protected forest, conservationists have come to consider grass-root action to protect natural resources based on their belief and customary practices. Some conservation organisations such as IUCN, WWF, Conservation International and the Alliance of Religion and Conservation (ARC) believe it is necessary to find alternatives to protect the Earth in more creative ways. They are seeking to involve the local community by considering tradition, religion and culture in protecting and respecting nature. Birdlife for

example, tried to revive a *hima* in Lebanon that was identified as an Important Bird Area. These organisations are trying to revive *himas* in the Middle East via their various networks in Yemen, Palestine, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

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INDONESIA



Yolanda, Darwin Initiative

snakes, lizards, turtles and others. These species are under threat today due to extensive poaching for consumption and trade.

The Indonesia Darwin Initiative, in association with Conservation International Indonesia, has also approached the Guguak Malalo community in Padang, West Sumatra, to integrate Islam for the protection of the Sumateran forest through the *adat* system, which is based on the Hutan Adat Nagari (where the authorised local communities regulate and manage their territory based on local customs, recognised and respected by the Indonesian government).

In other Muslim areas, conservation by *hima* (see box story Reviving the hima) is also being established. The *hima* approach has worked extremely well to protect marine regions in Misali Island, Zanzibar Africa. **AG**

▲ Teachers from West Sumatra visit the forest at Guguak Malalo to learn about the Islamic teaching for conservation.

Fachruddin Mangunjaya is the author of book *Nature Conservation in Islam*. He obtained his PhD from Bogor Agricultural University and now drives the Conservation and Religion Initiative within Conservation International Indonesia. <http://nature-of-indonesia.blogspot.com>

[INFO]

Getting there: Flights depart daily for Jakarta and Surabaya. Current airlines operating services into Palangkaraya are Garuda Indonesia, Sriwijaya Air, Lion Air and Batavia Air. Flights from Palangkaraya to Surabaya are operated by Batavia Air.

Accommodation: For Palangkaraya, there are many options such as the Amaris Hotel, Aquarius Boutique Hotel, Batu Suli International and Dandang Tingang Hotel. For Pangkalanbun, try the Abadi Hotel, Avila Hotel and Rimba Ecolodge.

Attractions: The Regional Museum has collections of historical and cultural interest, including samples of Dayak art architecture and local crafts of Central Kalimantan. Tangkiling National Park, along the Kahayan River near Palangkaraya, has a lot of endangered species of animals, including the orang-utan and clouded leopard. The longhouse at Tumbang Malahui, in the Rungan district with its walls of tree bark.

Fun facts/trivia: Palangkaraya is a small city of some 300,000 people. English is rarely spoken, so you will need to learn a few words of basic Bahasa Indonesia to get around.

Currency: US\$1 = IDR8,542 (Indonesian rupiah)

Online info: indonesia.travel/en/destination/492/central-kalimantan, borneotourgiant.com/Central_Kalimantan

impressed many conservationists. It tells of how Islamic teachings may protect endangered animals, regulating consumption patterns within the community to control the poaching of wildlife. Consuming primates is *haram* (prohibited) according to Islamic law, saving the orang-utans from becoming an endangered species and eventually facing the risk of extinction. Some classic scholarly books of Islamic teachings, which refer to *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), explicitly prohibit the consumption of ape or monkey, and include animals such as tigers, eagles,