

Sintang Sinting by Willie Smits

A brief report on the Orangutan Outreach "O-Team" Rescue Operation in West Kalimantan

Sintang is the name of a city in the Indonesian province of West Kalimantan. *Sinting* means “evil or crazy” in Indonesian. And for sure this survey and rescue operation undertaken in May 2010 is showing Sintang to be a very bad and unlucky place for many orangutans.



Sintang is located deep in the heart of Borneo and used to be 88 hours away by boat on Indonesia's longest river, the Kapuas, from Pontianak, the capital of the Indonesian province of West Kalimantan. Sintang can now be reached by road in less than 10 hours if the weather is not too bad.

Sintang lies on the equator, in the heartland of the Dayak tribes that lived here for approximately five thousand years doing their hunting, gathering and dry land rice culture. There are still some traditional communal long houses in the interior but the forest on which these communities depended is vanishing fast. When I traveled here

in 1987 there were still many large trees along the Kapuas River and its tributaries, and the water was still clean. But this is now the land of the oil palm, of gold mining, of polluted rivers and degraded lands, and misery for its original inhabitants the orangutans. And because of the speed and extent at which the oil palms are taking over the forest home of the orangutans, there are more orangutan victims here than anywhere in the world.

When I initiated the Central Kalimantan orangutan program in 1996 with Karel S., a hard working Papuan who was at that time the head of the small nature conservation office of the Ministry of Forestry in Palangkaraya, I thought the situation facing the orangutans could not be much worse. I was coming from Balikpapan in East Kalimantan and had seen a lot of orangutan misery, but Central Kalimantan, with the opening up of forests for Suharto's one million hectare rice field project beat it easily. During the fires of 1997/1998 I had to rescue hundreds of orangutans from that deforestation area. As a result I changed the name of BOS, at that time standing for Balikpapan Orangutan Society to Bornean Orangutan Society, which later again became the Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation. A decade later, and still BOS, still orangutans, still no survival... Now coming back here to West Kalimantan and in just three days having the counter of orangutans in need of immediate rescue at around 50, I realize that this place right now is the worst in all of Indonesia. 50 is only the beginning. Who can count how many hundreds of innocent orangutans have already been murdered?

We have heard so many reports of orangutans that were shot and eaten, so many baby orangutans sold to Kuching in Sarawak (Malaysia). The road to Malaysia's Sarawak strangely enough is much better maintained than the road to Palangkaraya. Kuching can be reached from Sintang in a mere 4 hours! And large amounts of trucks make use of it and are heading towards Malaysia carrying Indonesia's treasures, amongst which are so many orangutan babies. Many of those, by the way, actually turned out to come from even farther away in Central Kalimantan.

This is a war zone as far as both the local people's future as well as that of the orangutans is concerned. We have to do something big and swift...

Tuesday, May 25th, 2010. Late afternoon. Jakarta Airport.

The team assembles from all directions. I first meet with Pramodya, our local Orangutan Outreach staff, who has done more work for orangutans than anyone realizes. Pram normally does the most dangerous activities, working undercover and in the background. It is his remarkable footage and imagery that has been spread around the world virally—photos and video clips depicting unbelievable cruelties to orangutans and the catastrophic destruction of their habitat. This time Pram will stay behind and coordinate back-up support for our field operations.

Next to arrive is Femke den Haas, founder of the Jakarta Animal Aid Network (JAAN), who I first brought with me into the Sungai Wain forest for six months to do post release monitoring of the orangutans we released there in 1993. Seventeen years of working for nature conservation and incredibly good with primates and veterinary matters, Femke will be a key player to help the orangutans we expect to find.

Then comes Seto, with his full head of thick hair and revolutionary beard. He works for the Centre for Orangutan Protection (COP) and this joint Orangutan Outreach/COP operation is expected to set a new standard for cooperation in fieldwork. COP has identified 12 orangutans in West Kalimantan in illegal captivity who are in need of rescue. The Sintang-based local Kobus Foundation has also found 14 orangutans that we need to rescue. How many on the lists will prove to be the same is still a big question... Then there is my good friend Jan Geerdink, a loyal supporter of the orangutans and the fingerprint expert from the Dutch police. He will help with the sampling needed to identify the origin of the orangutans.

And finally there is the Orangutan Outreach founder and director Richard Zimmerman, who will join me on his first orangutan rescue mission in the field, so he can witness firsthand what is needed. He will use his trusty iPhone to take people along on the trip using Facebook and Twitter.

During the flight we discuss the strategy and look at the records of the orangutans COP has listed. Jan Geerdink points out that the folds under the eyes of young orangutans seem to have unique patterns that could aid in the identification of individuals. This is indeed a potentially very useful observation.

Landing late at night in Pontianak we confirm the small Cessna plane that is to take us deep into the heartland of Borneo, we make calls with Ministry of Forestry officials, and we go through the long list of orangutans that have been found by COP. Rivalino, one of COP's field investigators has already gone to check out their latest condition ahead of the arrival of our team, so we can move quickly and accurately once we get there. We're all set and a mere five hours later at sunrise we agree to assemble in the main lobby of the hotel to get into a car to transport us to the MAF hangar.

Wednesday, May 26th, 2010



The weather is great, which is no mere pleasantry when about to do a low fly over Borneo! When we arrive at the hangar the first thing we do is mount the scales. The five of us and our luggage weigh in at 427 kilograms-- just three kilograms short of the maximum allowed. We're lucky Seto has decided to come with us instead of Hardi, Director of COP, as had originally been planned. Had Pram come instead of Femke, we also would have been in a tight spot! In any case, we make a note of the importance of offsetting our carbon footprint.

We are in the air, and after passing the large swamp to the east of Pontianak and the first oil palm



plantations, the clouds become so thick that we cannot see anything beneath us anymore and the pilot has to fly using his GPS and the distant peaks of Gunung Palung and Gunung Kelam as guides. Fortunately shortly before Sintang the clouds break open and after circling the airport once to give the people on the ground a chance to get off the unprotected landing strip Gerhard, our German pilot, makes a smooth landing.

Awaiting us is father Jacques Maessen, a Dutch catholic priest, now Indonesian, who

has been living and working as a missionary in the interior here for the last 42 years and knows everything and everybody. With his great smile, heartfelt laugh and incredible drive, combined with sumptuous supplies of rice and palm wine, he has been able to get many people from afar to come to this remote corner of the world and help set up projects that benefit the local Dayaks as well as the Malay and Chinese communities of Sintang. His latest addition in the string of successes is the new long house of the cooperative of traditional weavers. More than a thousand women work here maintaining the patterns and stories that nearly disappeared. Tomorrow, besides us, there will also be some people from the Dutch fire fighters and DSM, a Dutch company that is running the Water4Life projects in the area. Father Jacques, nearly 70, but still going strong, outpacing many younger people and with muscular arms from his daily afternoon work in his beautiful garden, can juggle all of these things with ease.

Father Jacques drives himself. The last car his large family back home has said he can have. During this visit he mentions at least three times that in the Netherlands during his last visit they dared to call him a fossil! Well, he is not ready to go into that category yet! When we arrive at the Kobus Foundation it looks as if nothing has changed since my last visit. Tiny, but very much in control, Dwi,

Jacques's loyal assistant, awaits us with a group of tiny Dayak children. We all get our traditional Dayak shawls draped around our necks by the wonderful little children in traditional clothing. After many pictures with the colorful crowd we go through the house filled with Dayak antiques and make our way towards the famous Kobus back terrace. A Dutch breakfast stands ready and together with Rivalino of COP and Ribai, the son of a local Dayak tribal leader who assists father Jacques, we immediately get to the business of identifying the total list of orangutans-- combining the 12 and 14 the two parties had identified before. Our counter now stands at 20!



A quick check of the old facilities that I built here several years ago is in order. Because I ran out of money with the Gibbon Foundation and we could not guarantee enough security there, we had to transfer the animals at that time to other centers. But now I am back in action—thanks to Richard and Orangutan Outreach! In the beautifully landscaped garden that has miraculously sprung to life on what is some of the most infertile kaolinite clay on the planet, we make an inventory of what can

still be used of the former Kobus Animal Transit Center cages. They are still in good condition! A bit of maintenance left and right, but nothing insurmountable. Paint, locks and other materials are ordered and Femke gives lots of instructions. One thing is immediately apparent: we will need more land for cages! Imagine 20 orangutans! Father Jacques explains about the trouble he has with Mr. Ruslan, a very difficult neighbor. Although the land was not being used he would not allow father Jacques to buy it for the foundation, perhaps out of fear that he would build a church there.

Time to go. Jacques wants to take us to meet Mr. Aminudin, the owner of a female orangutan named Pingki, and when we get to his house in a small back alley he introduces himself. Aminudin is a self made man with a leg somewhat deformed by polio. He is shaven bald, with heavy eyebrows and a piercing look. While handling his cigarette in a macho way he tells how he has three times refused to give up his female orangutan named Pingki. The police, the army, the forestry office-- nobody could take Pingki from him. He does not trust them to take good care of Pingki and wherever she goes he should always be able to ask for her back. They did not want that so he kicked them out. Indeed Mr. Amin is somewhat of a tough local neighborhood hero who knows everybody.

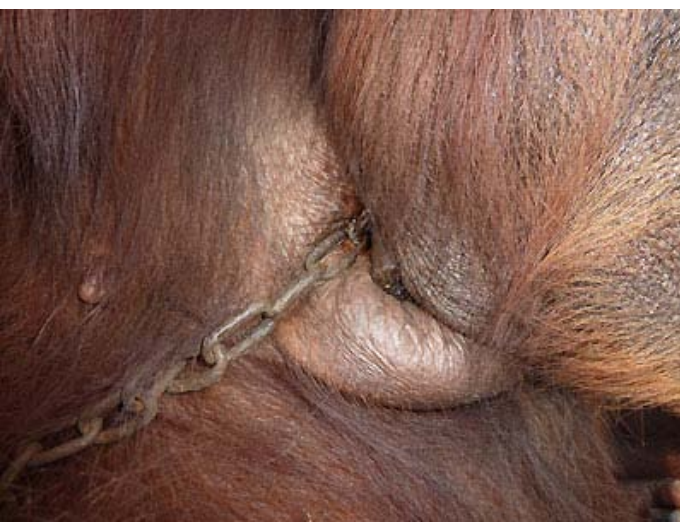
I let him keep talking, and when he runs out of verbal ammunition I start my quiet build up of reasons why Pingki should be helped. The rules yes, the laws need to be obeyed, but I try a different



approach. He says he loves her, so then why would he prevent her from having babies herself and being free? And it is amazing that he is more important even than the President of Indonesia who is the only person who can with his personal signature grant a permit for a private person to have an orangutan! And by the way, that has never happened in the history of the Indonesian Republic! I do not talk yet about taking away Pingki. Aminudin clearly is not the type of guy who will go down without a fight, and I need to get him to understand the bigger picture of the plight of the orangutans in the wild. His wife is not there either, and the wives are often more difficult even. So the timing is not yet ready, but I can feel him softening and he is clearly impressed with what I tell him about the orangutans out there in the forest. Time to ask to see Pingki.

Mr. Aminudin points to the back of the shed, where behind the bushes we find the saddest looking female orangutan imaginable tied with a five foot chain to a tree in the blazing sun. For 13 years she has been sitting like that chained to this tree... Her face is black from the sunburns. The rusty chain seems to disappear inside her neck, fully ingrown. She is afraid but when I lay down near her she loosens up. She does not like the many clicking and flashing cameras and the strange foreign looking people watching her in awe from a few meters away. Femke joins me and also easily gets Pingki to touch her. She can see we are good people. She lifts up her chain to reduce the pain while moving, turns around and gets an empty plastic bottle from behind the tree and asks Femke to fill it with water. She is thirsty, but there is no water to be seen within reach!

Mr. Aminudin has been watching with amazement. Just a moment before he had told us that recently, after Pingki started menstruating, she had sometimes become highly unpredictable. She would sometimes lash out without any reason... something she would normally only do when someone tried to touch food that was inside her reach of the five-foot chain. And now his beloved Pingki was opening up to those two strangers! You



could clearly see him thinking about what he was seeing. I took pictures of the ingrown rusty chain and when I ask Pingki she lifts her head to show me the festering wound that seems to cut off her head. The wound stinks and it must hurt terribly. When she drinks a can of Sprite she has to shake her head to let the liquid pass by the choking chain inside her neck. What a sad, sad creature Pingki is...

I explain to Mr. Aminudin that Pingki has parasites and that he and his little son better take some Mebendazol or Combantrin themselves, since they are bound to have the same thing Pingki has. I explain that there are loads of other human diseases and orangutan diseases that can cross between them and us. I clearly have him worried now, but I can see he is not yet completely ready. So I tell the group we have to move on. I want to get some other orangutans first to convince Mr. Aminudin that this is serious. I ask him if we can come back tomorrow to treat Pingki's severe wound and he agrees. In a breakthrough moment, he says that he knows of 8 more babies in the houses just around his house! And there is a mother and baby and two small orangutans being hunted nearby. They will eat them and catch the baby, he says. Those should also be helped—and he will help us get them! We got him! I feel Aminudin will give up Pingki tomorrow. The counter now stands above 30! Richard does not like having to leave Pingki behind to suffer for even one more day, but I have no time to explain to him what I've been doing. We have to move on. There is so much work to be done... We need to go to the Ministry of Forestry, the local nature conservation service that is legally in charge of all orangutan matters. We have to prepare for many more confiscations and voluntary handovers of many more orangutan babies.

When we arrive with our large group at the office of the Ministry of Forestry, we find some lower ranking forestry policemen hanging around smoking. Mr. Suparto, the head of the office, is having a rest. We ask politely yet seriously to call for the head of the office. A big forestry policeman, not the head, shows up and I explain what we have come to do. I need to push a bit, but he finally agrees to get Mr. Suparto, who shows up rather uneasily. Yes, he has heard of me when I was still with the Ministry of Forestry. But the rules you know... Yes, I know the rules, I helped write the rules as an official in the Ministry of Forestry, the very rules he is referring to! But there hardly are any orangutans in Sintang, he says. I assure him there in fact are, and that we have confirmed it ourselves. Seto comes up with more detailed information than the office head can give on the whereabouts of the orangutans in Sintang as well as the well being of those the Ministry of Forestry temporarily provided to facilities that dare to call themselves 'zoos'.

In the end, Mr. Suparto says that in principle he will support us as long as his head office in Pontianak supports us. We call them, but the response is the same: the rules!!! Again I explain that the rules say that the Ministry of Forestry has to respond to the information provided by the people! Very frustrating. We ask the head to come to our meeting with the Bupati, the district head of Sintang, to discuss the official cooperation of our new orangutan center to be established here under the Kobus Foundation run by the highly respected church in West Kalimantan. He promises to come tomorrow morning. We head back to have lunch at Kobus.

After lunch Seto, Rivalino, Ribai and I leave on two motorbikes to start our survey. The rest of the team goes with father Jacques to the potential interim release and training forest for the orangutans - just across the street of the Kobus Foundation. It is a "city forest" in the middle of the town, 250 hectares of virgin swamp forest, completely isolated from all other standing forests. It will be perfect as a training forest for the orangutan babies if we can get it. Tomorrow we will officially ask the district head for permission to use it.

Ribai skillfully steers the small motorbike through the busy traffic on the poorly maintained streets of Sintang. We arrive at a house with many cages surrounding it. It belongs to a civil servant of the public maintenance service. We park the bikes and while Seto walks to the door to find the owner of the orangutan I walk straight to the back of the house and next to a very large nervous eagle I find

the cage with a very weak self-clinging orangutan baby girl. I take some pictures of her and then go to Seto who is talking to the wife of the owner.

I take off my shoes and sit down and start asking why they have so many birds and fruit trees and flowers. Surely they are animal lovers, but why the illegal orangutan baby? Where did she come from? They bought her from a policeman. He shot the mother with his police gun while patrolling for the oil palm plantations in Central Kalimantan, near the border with West Kalimantan. The mother was eaten and because the policeman could not afford the milk for the baby, they bought her for 600.000 Rupiah from him-- about \$65 USD. The mother's 40 kilograms fetched 3.500 Rupiah (40 cents) per kilogram. So the total value of mother and child was less than \$75 USD! It makes me incredibly angry, but I have to maintain my cool and pretend I understand... When Richard hears this, he will be absolutely heartbroken.



We are waiting for the husband to finish his prayers and come out. When he does I continue the questioning and provision of information. When I come to the law he immediately understands. He is a civil servant, after all. He risks much-- his job and pension-- if he gets in trouble with the law. All that is left is to convince the child of the family that this baby has to go, that she is sick, which indeed is the case. Clearly filled with parasites, self clinging, sneezing, a slight fever, typical of heavy parasite load, it all fits. I ask if I can call in the rest of the team to take some pictures and when I explain that there will be no legal repercussions if he helps us, they agree.

I go with them to the 2-year-old female with typical light orange Central Kalimantan hair. She is weak, but she comes to me and to the astonishment of the owners asks me to lift her in



her arms. Her name is Luna. They do not know that that means moon. Indeed there is a full moon that evening. Then they tell me about the other baby orangutan that died a few weeks before. It was a male they had gotten from a nearby family friend, who had gotten him from a taxi driver. When the orangutan got sick he gave it to them, but he died in the cage with Luna a few weeks later. Again the same story... a taxi driver and an orangutan baby stolen from Central Kalimantan...

These people clearly were not traders. They only kept animals as a hobby. On the other side of the house was a monkey chained to a tree-- a long tail macaque

named Jojo who had been there for two years. Children freely played with him. They also had goats and a cow, and chickens and many more songbirds... When Femke and the team arrive I give the baby to Richard who has tears in his eyes. More pictures, trying to feed Luna, give her milk, which she would only take when a straw was provided. She refused to drink from the glass directly. She did not want any fruit other than banana. She was clearly very weak. I tried to interest her in the flowers and leaves of the trees but she had no strength to pull them. Her energy was so low. We had come just in time. We got in the car with Luna in Richard's arms and he sat repeatedly cooing to her, showering her with love and attention. The first Orangutan Outreach rescue was now a fact.

I told the owners we would be back the next day with the paperwork since the forestry office was now closed and we could not reach any officers. Being a civil servant himself he understood how these things worked.

It was getting late and we were invited to a party of the district head, who had just today been declared winner of the elections and won his second term in office. As it turned out, he was also being visited by the head of the army of West Kalimantan-- a very good coincidence indeed!

I sent off Rivalino to check on an orangutan being kept by a policeman named Sergeant Nono. The rest of us went back to the Kobus Foundation, cleaned up a bit, and with great difficulty managed to get Richard to put on one of the pastor's Batik shirts and finally come to the car where the pastor was nervously waiting. Richard and I have so far missed three (!) flights because he cannot pull himself loose when there is an orangutan around. He is in love with them, and wants only to be with



them and do whatever he can to help them, comfort them. And at this moment, lovely little Luna had his full attention!

As we were getting ready to leave, Rivalino came back from checking on the policeman's orangutan. The arrogant cop who had a dangerously sick, malnourished, skin & bones orangutan chained up absolutely refused to give the orangutan up-- and even physically threatened our guys! Perfect! Just what we needed...

We were late for the event, but father Jacques, narrowly missing a motorbike driver, got us to the house/palace of the district head just in time. The long row of Caucasian people entering the party was greeted with enthusiasm and the usual stares. Congratulations for the Bupati and we sat down to wait for the ceremony to come. When the Bupati was no longer talking to the head of the army, Colonel Toto Rinanto S., I decided to make my move. I approached him and knelt in front of them and asked if I could disturb them briefly. I was asked to sit next to the Colonel who was very curious who this large, Indonesian-speaking, white person might be.

I explained who we were and why the team was there. Much smuggling of Indonesian orangutan babies to Malaysia was going on. And here in Sintang and nearby Nanga Pinoh was the source of the problem, the constant supply of orangutan babies coming from as far away as neighboring Central Kalimantan. In Malaysia they called themselves "conservationists", but everything got smuggled from Indonesia, so it was the Indonesians who ended up with the bad reputation. And the worst of all...

dear colonel, it is partly your people doing it!!! For example this sergeant Nono in Block A, threatening the law!

I got his attention as well as that of the Bupati. The colonel was incredibly upset and promised to issue an immediate decree to all army personnel and police to give up their orangutans and not to be involved whatsoever with wildlife. The Bupati promised to meet us the next morning after the colonel had left Sintang. Walking back to my seat I noticed the neighbor of Kobus, Mr. Ruslan, a prominent Muslim figure who had also been invited to the party, so I immediately grabbed the chance to speak to him. Wow! Some anger! But I got him to think and talk and eventually he gave me an opening.



I sat back next to father Jacques smiling and told him what had just happened and with a good feeling watched the traditional Malayan and Dayak dances. Some pictures with the dancers, then off to the foundation and to Luna who was not feeling so well. Dr. Siti, the head of the Sintang museum was here with a number of students. I spent time talking to them, then we watched the movies they had been making about floating river houses, river pollution, and deforestation. I arranged for a

cooperation project under which the students would now produce animal conservation movies and do interviews with high officials and local Dayaks and broadcast the work locally. Great motivation for the students!



Richard took Luna under his care. Not much sleep that night... He kept holding her hand and stroking her till the morning. Seto contacted the local vet to drop by in the morning. The others had some very good rice wine for which the pastor is famous. Jacques has two old ladies who know exactly how to make it to his liking and he knows the perfect temperature to serve it at! Sitting at the top terrace we talked about what we were going to discuss with the Bupati the next day. The rice wine helped us all get some sleep—except Richard, who was determined to make sure Luna was as comfortable as possible. Day one of the operations was done, Luna was with us, and the Sintang Emergency Orangutan Rescue Project was now a fact!

Thursday, May 27th, 2010

The beautiful house buzzes with early morning activity. Contractors are here with the first designs for the new cages, the clinic, the keeper house, etc. People are also readying the existing facilities for the orangutans we will be bringing back that afternoon. We call to the Bupati's house to find out if he is ready to receive us, and we go through the lists of orangutans we will visit today. The local veterinarian arrives and I ask him to check on Luna. He is very gentle. When I ask if he can come by every day until our permanent vet is stationed here he immediately agrees. How much? Nothing! He just likes orangutans and will help us find more. What a pleasant surprise-- another caring individual who is willing to help the orangutans in their time of need.

Finally, there is the phone call to father Jacques! Time to go to the Bupati. We call the forestry head, who is still sleeping, but someone promises he will be there. We arrive and take seats at a round table on the big, hot terrace of the Bupati. After some niceties, the Bupati tells us that he had all the animals of the former Bupati removed from his palace because he had enough work taking care of his people. He also mentions that he had planted all these trees to attract wild birds.



Then we move on to our bullet list...First thing. Many orangutans. Action needed. We need you. Can you make nature conservation part of your priority program? A bit of a reluctant start, but when I told Bupati Mr. Milton Crosby that I was planting sugar palms in North Sulawesi and East Kalimantan, and that perhaps my patent for the Village Hubs that provide sustainable energy, drinking water, fuel, communication and cattle feed might be suited for his district as well. Now I had his full attention! He will survey his sugar

palms, for which by the way already some Manadonese people from North Sulawesi had visited him, so he smells an opportunity! We will come back to an investment proposal soon. Now in a better mood we continue to usurp one and a half more hours of his thirty minutes that we had been granted. He is on a roll—and so are we!

City forest for training orangutans? Sure. Could he perhaps fix the water level? Yes, but how about sharing the cost then? Just small dams. Can he help us with release areas? Yes, we can choose from three locations he is offering. We will arrange for surveys. Can he call his colleague the Bupati of Nanga Pinoh, who has an illegal orangutan in his home, so he will hand it over and allow us to publicize it? Okay! Will he help the students to make the movies and be willing to be interviewed and make a strong statement for animal protection and ending the trade? Of course! My pleasure! Could he help with getting more land for the animal rescue facilities from Mr. Ruslan the difficult neighbor? Okay, that will take a few more days, but yes he will do that too. Then he enthusiastically tells us about his organic farming, the great recipes he has for biological control. I like this local Dayak a lot!

Then, just before I thought about standing up and thanking the Bupati for the meeting, the local forestry head comes in with a number of his staff. We discuss the old proposal for an official cooperation between the Bupati, the Kobus Foundation and the Forestry office. The forestry head keeps saying that he needs a piece of paper first. He does not want to do anything against the rules!

The Bupati sets up a meeting with the law experts for next week to discuss the cooperation proposal that Ribai and I worked on late last night, of which we left a copy with him! Great! What a fast guy!

We go back to the Foundation, lunch is provided by the contractor and his wife! The pastor is very important in Sintang. The Chinese community will take care of his 70th birthday. Some Dayaks come and bring more palm wine for tonight! The visitors of Water4Life arrive. Luna is still sick, nestling snugly in Richard's arms. We arrange for the veterinarian Dr. Wardhani of JAAN to come and help out the first two weeks. And Femke's husband, who is an expert at building primate cages and also has worked a lot with orangutans, will come with her. After going to the ATM to get more cash for the operations, we leave for the forestry office to pick up some forestry police at 2 o'clock.

We arrive, but there are no people in the office. Empty! Phones off! In the cracked building next to the office and the expensive firefighting equipment donated from abroad there is a billiards table. Lots of people here, but no officials. How can this be? One guy accidentally shows up and we force him to get the forestry head. He finally comes and refuses to give us support. Not good, we need them for the legal basis. More phone calls, and threats. If you do not do your job, I will make sure you won't need to do it anymore! He gets scared and agrees to give us some forestry police. But they have to make letters first. We leave Seto behind to make sure it happens and to keep us informed-- and then leave for Pingki and her rusty chain...



Mr. Aminudin is not there... Not good. But his wife is and I have the chance to convince her that Pingki has to come with us. But where is her husband? Ribai jumps on his motorbike to find Aminudin. In the meantime we hear from Seto that the forestry police have come to the house of the owner of Luna! I race there by motorbike and without problems the paperwork is signed as planned! What a relief. Mr. Tatyö the owner now tells us about two other orangutans that were not on our list! There is a nearby village head

named Mr. Yunaidi from Bloyang, with an orangutan and a Mr. Sukardi in the nearby housing compound who also has a baby! We add the new records to our ever-growing list and race back to Pingki and Mr. Aminudin's house.

When we get there Ribai comes back while we try to comfort Pingki, who is so sad... Aminudin won't come home from his garden! Shit! I jump on the back of Ribai's motorbike and go on a bad road to the forest where he is making a new fish pond in the peat forest. After the third bridge, I see in a flash someone with an orangutan in a small alley! I record the alley in my memory and we drive full speed as far as the road allows to the garden of Aminudin. We sit down relaxed above his pond, although inside I cannot be in a greater hurry because I want to get that baby I just saw in the alley, and the others need to help Pingki. So I lean back, accept some water to drink and I explain much more about orangutans. In the meantime I will learn later that Richard and Femke were getting very worried waiting all the time with Pingki. When I feel he is ready I say it to Aminudin straight: It is time to let go of Pingki. Please come, let's get that chain out of her neck and help her to live free. He nods silently. Okay! He will come by himself...

Ribai and I drive back towards Sintang and we find the alley back. Sure enough another orangutan baby that was not on the list! A Mr. Hamdan is sitting there with his grandson. The orangutan's name is Pungki! Just a one letter and 10 years age difference. It is a three-year-old male with the body weight of a one-and-a-half-year-old orangutan. He has very scared eyes. I explain the usual things. But Mr. Hamdan is very aggressive. I ask Ribai to leave me there and go get the forestry police who in the meantime have arrived at Mr. Aminudin's house after finishing the paperwork at Luna's owner's house.



More people gather while I refuse to stand up from the terrace next to the cage of Pungki. Then the son comes home. His name is Danny, and it is his orangutan. He bought him for one million Rupiah (about \$120 USD) from a taxi driver who got him from, again (!), Central Kalimantan! I show them the worms in Pungki's excrement and the signs of parasites. I explain that the law is very strict. Danny concedes. Okay we can take Pungki. His father-in-law however makes trouble. He wants compensation! Then Ribai on his old

bike and the forestry police arrive and they actually do a good job with their green uniforms. The patrol car and the group of police do impress Hamdan. He now also reluctantly gives in.

But angrily he says: you should take all of them! He points less than 50 meters away: There in the yellow house there are two more! I immediately jump up and walk towards the house. A young girl, who turns out to already be a mother, opens the door and I just straightaway ask if I can please see the cute orangutan babies. Sure! I walk through the room to the toilet... Horrible! Disgusting! In the stench above the garbage two babies clinging to each other! I let Ribai get two of the forestry police to guard these babies after taking some pictures. I rush back to get Pungki out of his cage and jump with Pungki on the bike to bring him to the nearby house of Mr. Aminudin, where the team hopefully is still waiting.



The team has been working hard with Mr. Aminudin, who kept his word and came back to the house and is now helping to tranquilize Pungki. But only half of the anesthetic goes in! Pungki goes clambering up the tree and the chain in her neck tightens and blood flows from her throat! Femke tries to get her down but she is very upset now and lunges out at Femke. Finally Femke manages to give another stab with an injection needle and now Pungki decides to slowly come down. We secure the chain so she cannot go up the tree anymore and

wait for her to fall asleep. I hand Pungki to Richard and help cut through the chain, assisted by Mr. Aminudin. The neck wound looks terrible... Then Seto and I lift Pungki and carry her out. She is not

that heavy but her long arms hanging loose make it not so easy so Seto and I take turns carrying her alone over the shoulder through the maze of small paths towards the main road where the car is parked.



At the car I hand over sleeping Pingki to Femke who holds her on her lap in the backseat, and the team departs for the Kobus Foundation to operate on Pingki and remove the rotting and dead tissue from where the chain had been in her neck for 13 years.

I race back to the house with the two orangutan babies. I find the forestry police in a restaurant along the road a few hundred meters from the house. A mob has assembled by the house and they are aggressive. I cannot get them to come

back with me, but Ribai and Seto do dare to come with me. I pay for their food and drinks and after a quick sip of coffee we are off again.

At the yellow house just a few people are left. But some troublemaker tries to incite problems. He stands no chance. I stand so close to him that he has to look straight up and when he decides he wants to shake hands he feels the force of the giant and finally shuts up. I want to get the forestry police back now but when we call them they are somewhere else looking for fuel and more food...

I talk to the very young mother. I show her pictures on my iPhone of my granddaughters. She listens to my explanations. Her husband arrives and I get more information about the orangutans: Momo and Mimi. Momo is a 3-year-old male, Mimi a two-and-a-half-year-old female. The woman's husband helps to break open the boards that have permanently locked down the cage with heavy nails in the iron wood board. There is another cage with another long tail macaque... who is very aggressive. Not a surprise. Momo also turns out to be from Central Kalimantan. Mimi, I'm told, came from the nearby forest! Her mother was eaten. 500.000 Rupiah per orangutan baby. \$60 USD. The usual stories...



Finally the forestry police show up. But now some woman keeps calling the husband and she is vicious. Several times I speak to her on the phone and manage to verbally subdue her. But she keeps calling back and calling the shots! Then, while the husband signs the papers, I walk out, but the police cannot get out! So I sit with two very busy orangutan babies on my lap in the car and they start destroying mirrors, and decorations! I cannot wait, we have to go! It is dark, it's getting late, I am soaked with

sweat and covered in orangutan pee, getting stressed after all these hours. So I take the two babies in my arms and again mount the bike of Ribai. We drive for half an hour and finally, very tired, we reach the Kobus Foundation. In the specially prepared back room Richard, Jan Geerdink and Femke

are very busy. They just bought more stuff and are setting it all up. I hand over the babies to Jan Geerdink and have to go see some visitors. My smell is not so nice!

I grab a quick bite to eat. Luna likes carrots and *duku*, so at least she's eating. Two Canadian volunteers show up. They want to help COP, and after some discussions we agree that they can come along tomorrow on the raid of the house of the Bupati of Nanga Pinoh. They are made official volunteers of the Kobus Foundation. Mark and Sandra promise to help us with good photos and film materials of everything. Richard agrees.

Talking to the Dutch water visitors, talking to a tired Richard, setting up arrangements with tiny Dwi to leave behind money, to hire babysitters and security, to set up a reporting system. Working through the quotations for the construction, calling people in Tasikoki (another Orangutan Outreach project in North Sulawesi) to see if they have a vet nurse they can spare to help the five orangutans in Sintang, and dealing with so much other stuff. Very soon to be likely several dozen... Our counter now stands at around 40 orangutans... A little more palm wine this time. A shower and finally some sleep after a couple of calls around the world for my sugar palms and other work. End of day two.

Friday, May 28th, 2010.

No forestry police, so we cannot go to Nanga Pinoh-- yet! Cars that we chartered were waiting. Talks with foreign water people, more planning in the garden, visiting museum, long house, buying stuff for Orangutan Outreach to help the Dayak cooperative. While we are eating breakfast a mentally disturbed man walks into the garden, sits at the table and tries to pull Luna's arms while she rests on Richard's lap! I have to physically remove the man from the compound. We go to the Forestry office again on the way back from the museum. Empty. But I find the casually dressed head in an office by himself. It's an official free day. I apologize for the rough treatment of the day before but say that he can be proud of what his guys achieved yesterday. He agrees. We will get some forestry police. They will come by motorbike to Nanga Pinoh themselves. We will also arrange to have a guard stationed at Korbus.

We leave for Nanga Pinoh. Horrible road. After two and a half hours we arrive there much too late. I have asked the Cessna to pick us up there at the tiny air strip. The clock is ticking. Most afternoons the weather gets so bad that we cannot get out of the interior. But we're in luck! Gerhard the pilot mentions that the plane had to do an emergency evacuation and we have an extra hour on the

ground now! In any case, we really need to get our amphibious plane into the air-- but it has not yet been equipped with an emergency transponder and needs two more permits to fly in Kalimantan.



At the office of the Bupati, there is no orangutan to be found! But the army guards are friendly enough to tell us that the orangutan indeed exists and has been moved to the house of the Bupati. We go there. I walk in and see the sick baby in the back. The army guards want to stop me. They are not sure what to think of this foreign-looking person who speaks perfect Indonesian and seems to know a lot about rules and regulations. So they decide to report my presence. An

office assistant comes out of the house and after some arguing understands he has to call the wife of the Bupati.

We sit and wait and finally she comes out. The cameras do not make her happy, but I manage to draw her attention to her children and the sick orangutan. She understands, but she has to ask her husband. I'm guessing she will be instructed to just sign the papers with the forestry police that indeed have arrived! Indeed her husband does not want to be seen on camera and she signs off on the paperwork, and I go and get the sick baby out of his cage. There is a little gibbon, too. They are best friends, so he will have to come as well. Femke and Seto deal with the gibbon. I carry the orangutan-- who does not even yet have a name-- out of the compound and put him in the transport cage. He had been given to the Bupati and the wife does not want to say how much compensation she gave for the orangutan baby. She just wanted to save it, she says. And giving something back is here not considered buying. Indeed, I have come across this argument many, many times...

Femke has bought some material to keep the cage in the back of the truck protected from the harsh equatorial sun. Someone back at Kobus had forgotten to do some things... We get calls from the MAF airplane. There is nobody at the airport, please help! We call some people and someone from the airport said they did not know about a plane coming this week. We send off the car and rush to the airport, a small open strip of concrete. And there is my old friend Daren-- the Florida missionary pilot who has flown me before in West Kalimantan. He has just landed. Amazingly there is someone asking us to pay the airport tax before taking off in the little Cessna! We store the luggage underneath and Daren brings us on a wonderful flight back to Pontianak. The prayers before takeoff have brought us wonderful and unusually good weather once again.

We get permission to fly low and see the destruction. Oil palms, gold mining, slash and burn agriculture, illegal logging, it is all in plain sight. When we finally land in Pontianak we make a group picture. The sun is setting. We check in for our flight back to Jakarta. The JAAN vet and Femke's husband have just boarded the night bus for the grueling trip to Sintang by road. Later Ribai reports that they had safely reached Sintang. Six orangutans, one gibbon, a new center and end of day three. Tomorrow Richard and I have a series of meetings with BOS Indonesia. Femke goes home, Seto to his office, Richard, Jan and myself drive to Bogor for the night. Some of us feel exhausted physically and emotionally. Richard especially has had a rough time with all he has seen. The first time is never easy. I strangely enough feel extremely fit. Maybe the adrenaline has not completely gone out of my bloodstream yet. Seto and the COP team are very happy with the successful mission and have learned a lot about rescuing orangutans...

There is something very important to be learned here, and I will spell it out: The thing is, we should just do it, not talk too much about it. How are we going to finance this new center? Well, I believe that when we show we can make a difference there will be people who are going to support us. I have faith in the process. We expect at least another 10 babies over the coming 10 days in Sintang. I think there will be many people who will be willing to adopt them and give these orangutans in one of the lost corners of West Kalimantan where nobody yet is working, a real chance. If we don't do it, nobody will, and we cannot just sit back and condemn these innocent orangutans to death—or worse...

In July I will be back with Richard and the team for a large meeting with five Dayak tribes and all the traditional leaders, priests and village heads. And more rescues. Stay tuned. Learn more on the Orangutan Outreach website: redapes.org

Willie Smits

(edited by Richard Zimmerman, some strategic information has been removed to secure future rescues)