

Forest Chatter

Issue 50 | December 2024

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From the President ...

I am proud to welcome you to the 50th edition, our final issue for 2024! This milestone allows me to reflect on our achievements and express my sincere gratitude for your steadfast support.

Thanks to your help, we have been able to continue our fight against the extinction of Bornean orangutans and the destruction of their rainforest homes.

You were there when our orangutans needed you the most—such as when we raised funds to build a new Forest School for the young orphans at our Nyaru Menteng 2 sanctuary. You also helped when our beloved double-

amputee, Kopral, needed assistance to heal his severely injured foot.

However, there is still so much to do. That's why I am kindly asking for your generosity once again. Please find out why our unreleasable orangutans urgently need **your support** this holiday season on page 2.

In this exciting edition, let's celebrate the release of our dear Meryl, meet super mom Du, learn more about our long-time residents from veterinarian Dr Fransiska Sulisty, and discover how we observe orangutans and other wildlife using camera traps.

Have a wonderful holiday season and a happy and healthy start to 2025.

With endless gratitude,

K WELFORD

Kerin Welford
President



Meryl is free

We are thrilled to announce that on 10 November 2024, our beloved Meryl finally embraced her freedom in the wild after being released into Bukit Baka Bukit Raya National Park.

The spirited female began her new chapter alongside five other orangutans: Bejo, Blegi, Happy,

Jengyos and Runtu. Before this moment, Meryl had spent about six months in an enclosure complex getting ready for this significant milestone in her life.

The ten-year-old has come a long way. Argus Fachroni, Veterinarian Coordinator at the Nyaru Menteng Rehabilitation Centre, recalls that when Meryl arrived on 7 January 2015 curled up in a small local rattan basket, she was extremely frail. "Meryl was severely dehydrated, and there was a visibly swollen wound on her right arm, which turned out to be a fracture".

As her health improved and the years passed, she blossomed into the most beautiful and agile orangutan at Forest School. She graduated with flying colours and advanced to the pre-release stage in 2021.

Meryl's heartwarming rehabilitation journey has now come to an end. When her transport cage opened, she eagerly climbed the first tree she could find, as if she couldn't wait to explore her new home. Our Post-Release Monitoring team will closely monitor Meryl from a distance over the coming months to ensure she adapts well to her new environment.

While there is a bittersweet feeling in saying goodbye, Argus Fachroni expresses hope that "she will navigate the forest with the grace and confidence of a wild orangutan and become a vibrant, reproductive member of the forest community where she belongs."

Farewell, dear Meryl! May your new home be filled with boundless freedom and joy.



A haven for unreleasables

Sanctuary Islands are not just islands; they offer life-changing opportunities for orangutans, who would otherwise be condemned to live in cages.

Not all residents of the BOS Foundation's rehabilitation centres can return to a natural forest to live freely. Currently, 128 orangutans, known as the "unreleasables," are unable to live independently due to factors like infectious diseases, physical disabilities, and prolonged captivity that prevent them from developing natural behaviours. As a result, they will likely remain in the rehabilitation centre for the rest of their lives.

Still, our unreleasable orangutans do not have to spend their lives in captivity. At BOS, we are committed to providing them with a brighter future. For those without significant physical impairments, we strive to offer freedom on specially designed sanctuary islands.

On these secure forested islands, orangutans lacking survival skills can live outside the confines of a cage in an environment similar to a natural forest, all while benefiting from the security and support of a dedicated team of technicians and on-call

veterinarians. The river boundaries help keep out most predators, while the technicians deliver food daily to supplement the natural resources.

The largest of these islands is Badak Kecil Sanctuary Island, which covers an area of 105 hectares. Opened in 2018, Badak Kecil is the world's first natural reserve island dedicated exclusively to orangutans.

One of the main challenges in providing sanctuary care for unreleasable orangutans is securing the necessary funding. Long-term care for these animals involves significant costs, including decades' worth of food, medication, and the expenses associated with constructing suitable sanctuary enclosures and islands. In fact, the financial requirements for lifelong care are greater than those needed for rehabilitating an orangutan.

While we urgently need additional sanctuary islands at both centres, we specifically require help building five more islands at our new Nyaru Menteng location. We must relocate our current centre because we do not own the land and have to return it. Moreover, the orangutans' safety is at risk due to increasing human activities in the area.



The good news is that the BOS Foundation has acquired land we entirely own, allowing us to develop a new centre and sanctuary islands. However, we need to act more quickly than planned.

Each island requires extensive construction work to ensure the safety and well-being of our orangutans, allowing them to live as close to their natural habitat as possible. The islands will need fencing, canals, and other supporting infrastructure, a financial burden we cannot handle alone.

Will you help us raise \$50,000 by 25 December to build five new sanctuary islands this holiday season? These islands will provide a dignified and species-appropriate life for orangutans desperately waiting behind bars. Together, we can change their destiny and work towards our ultimate goal of moving all our orangutans out of their cages. Please **donate today!**

Meet our newest sun bear cub



Did you know that Samboja Lestari is also a sanctuary for rescued sun bears? Recently, we welcomed a new arrival—a tiny, two-month-old cub named Andre.

A few months ago, a villager searching for wood stumbled upon a helpless little sun bear. The baby

was alone, without his mother in sight. Rather than keeping the cub as a pet, the resident made the compassionate choice to contact the Natural Resources Conservation Agency for proper care.

When Andre first arrived at our centre, his frightened eyes and fragile body told the story of his ordeal. He recoiled from every human movement, avoiding contact. Only one thing could reach him: food. With patience and care, the dedicated sun bear team gently coaxed him out of his enclosure, starting his journey towards trust and healing.

We are relieved that our veterinarians found the little cub to be physically healthy, with no wounds or signs of illness. But he may still carry emotional scars from being separated from his mother. Being aware of this,

our team is dedicated to helping him heal and grow, with the ultimate goal of preparing him for a future where he can thrive in the wild.

Andre is currently being fed milk, the most suitable food for his age and needs. However, the care team is gradually introducing a variety of fruits into his diet to give him an early taste of the larger world he will eventually explore.

For now, Andre is placed in a designated baby bear area. Here, he will begin developing skills to sharpen his survival instincts.

You can help Andre and the other sun bears at Samboja Lestari hands-on by joining our Orangutan Enrichment Volunteer Program.

Find out all about this life-changing opportunity!

Snaps from traps

Since 2020, the BOS Foundation has worked with the University of British Columbia (UBC) in Canada and the Bogor Agricultural University to install camera traps in the Bukit Batikap Protected Forest.

Although they are called camera traps, these devices are completely harmless. They serve as a non-invasive tool for conserving and monitoring wildlife, including orangutans, for periods of 30 to 60 days in remote and hard-to-reach areas without the need for human presence. These cameras can gather valuable information about animals, such as their existence, behaviour, life cycles, and patterns of interaction.

Equipped with infrared sensors, camera traps can detect movement and automatically capture images of passing animals, allowing researchers to document a wide range of behaviours without disrupting the animals' natural routines.

The researchers strategically positioned cameras at 30 locations throughout the Bukit Batikap

Protected Forest. These cameras are placed along pre-existing trails at several key sites, roughly 500 to 1,000 meters apart. This arrangement covers the majority of the forest interior, which is challenging to access on a regular basis.

Since rehabilitated orangutans tend to be more curious than their wild counterparts and will most likely discover the cameras, the traps are housed in lockable boxes. Data is collected monthly by swapping out the SD cards, while batteries are changed every two months. The images captured on the SD cards are then downloaded, saved to hard drives, and regularly emailed from the field to the team at Nyaru Menteng and our collaborators at UBC.

While the primary goal is to monitor orangutans, the cameras have recorded many wildlife species. These include sun bears (*Helarctos malayanus*), pangolins (*Pholidota*), barking deer (*Muntjacus spp.*), and the rare Bornean crested fireback (*Lophura ignita*), whose presence is now known to be extremely scarce.



This information is invaluable for the BOS Foundation and its partners, as it helps them monitor wildlife population health and assess the effectiveness of their habitat protection efforts.

Du, Dea, Dinda, Dai & Dumel

Du's journey from her rescue in Thailand to becoming an experienced orangutan super mum is a beacon of hope for our conservation efforts.

Prepare for a tongue twister: Dea, Dinda, Dai and Dumel. These are four beautiful orangutans, and they all have an amazing mum. Her name is Du, and she is one of 49



other orangutans the Indonesian government successfully repatriated from Thailand in 2006. At that time, Du was over 10 years old, and after quarantine, she joined other orangutans on a pre-release island.

Three years after her return, Du became pregnant and gave birth to her first child, Dea, who grew into a smart and independent orangutan. As a result, she became one of the orangutans released in 2019 in the Bukit Baka Bukit Raya National Park.

Dea's reintroduction marks a significant achievement: when an orangutan is not only repatriated but also overcomes challenges to successfully rehabilitate and reproduce, their offspring also contributes to the species' future.

But Du didn't stop there; she gave birth to her second child, Dinda, in 2016, who has also grown into a confident female orangutan living independently on Kaja Pre-Release Island. In 2022, the BOS team

observed Du carrying a third baby, Dai. At the same time, her close friend Melata, another repatriated orangutan, also gave birth to a baby boy named Dumel. Unfortunately, Melata went missing at the beginning of 2023 - but to our surprise, Du readily adopted Dumel to raise him alongside her own boy Dai.

It is rare for female orangutans to carry two babies simultaneously. Most will only care for the next baby once the previous one is fully independent, which usually takes six to eight years or even longer.

After an orangutan male on the pre-release island almost kidnapped Dumel, Du and her two babies are currently back in the rehabilitation centre to keep them safe.

Du's example shows that the repatriation program is essential for preserving Indonesia's iconic species. We can't wait for Dinda, Dai and Dumel to one day thrive in their true wild home like their big sister, Dea.

HELLO, I AM FRANSISKA SULISTYO

We spoke with veterinarian and animal welfare specialist Fransiska Sulistyو about the future of unreleasable orangutans.

Could you tell our readers a little bit about your history with BOS?

I graduated as a veterinarian in 2007 and immediately joined the BOS Foundation at the Nyaru Menteng Centre, where I worked for about five years. After that, I earned my master's degree and returned to BOS in 2014 as the Animal Welfare Coordinator, a field I am very passionate about. Since 2018, I have been a Consultant on Veterinary and Animal Welfare.

As the Animal Welfare Coordinator, you worked with our unreleasable orangutans. Why can certain orangutans not return to the wild?

Some orangutans face challenges due to various reasons, and it would be unfair to release them. These include significant physical handicaps, such as missing multiple limbs, chronic infectious diseases, or having spent excessive time in captivity or under human care. We also have cases where the rehabilitation process didn't go as smoothly as planned or individuals have exceeded the window of learning. There is a critical age, around 15 years, that makes it very hard for orangutans to learn new skills and adapt to a new environment, especially when they have been confined in a cage since they were five or ten years old. While



they can still learn small welfare and maintenance behaviours, training an entire survival skill set is a greater challenge but not impossible.

What does life look like in our care?

We provide daily positive stimuli using enrichment items to prevent boredom. It's not just the types of enrichment we offer but the regular introduction of new items that keeps them engaged. Therefore, routinely changing these enrichment items is critical. Additionally, we emphasise the importance of providing challenging climbing structures to promote more active movement. I particularly like using ropes for orangutans to learn that their support is not rigid like cage bars or platforms but allows them to swing around.

How do you encourage orangutans to use these structures?

We can't expect orangutans to climb without a specific purpose, so the key is to engage their interest. For example, placing food items in hard-to-reach positions can motivate them. However, it's important to note that living in a cage cannot truly resemble their natural habitat. And while none of us at BOS want these orangutans in cages, unfortunately, that is the situation we are in right now as we don't have enough island space.

That's why we are currently raising funds to help build more Sanctuary Islands. However, there will always be those who cannot live on an island. How can we ensure a bright future for them?

Sadly, some orangutans, like our blind ones, require the level of support and security that an enclosure provides. Therefore, we are designing special enclosures that will support their condition while offering the right stimuli and challenges to keep them mentally and physically active. These enclosures could be, for example, dome-shaped and filled with structures that allow them to climb easily. Our goal is to provide our unreleasable orangutans with the highest quality of life in captive care and eventually get them out of their cages into a safe environment as natural as possible. Just like our healthy orangutans, they deserve a happy and dignified future.



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primates helping primates

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Thank you for your continued support.



We love hearing from you

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Can you help us?

Your donations provide food, shelter, protection, medicine and companionship for orangutans in our care. Visit www.orangutans.com.au to help us help them.

Donations by cheque are payable to Borneo Orangutan Survival (BOS) Australia at PO Box 7699, Bondi Beach NSW 2026.

Make a one-off or regular payment via direct debit or by credit card, either online or by calling us on +61 2 9011 5455. We also accept **Paypal** donations. See the link on the homepage of our website.

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