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WELCOME TO DANAU GIRANG FIELD CENTRE!

Danau Girang Field Centre opened its doors for the first time this week after 9 long months of hard work.

22 Students and Staff from Cardiff University arrived at the field centre on Saturday 19th July for the first ever field course at Danau Girang.

Situated in Lot 6 of the Lower Kinabatangan Wildlife Sanctuary, it is the first field study centre of its kind in the wetlands of Sabah. The site, which was previously used as an education centre by the Sabah Wildlife Department, has undergone a dramatic make-over in order to provide excellent facilities for research. A large scale clean up and renovation operation led to accommodation for staff, large groups and long-term researchers to be completed in time for the group's arrival, as well as the main building which includes a kitchen and eating



The first group of students from Cardiff University arrive in Sabah before setting off for DGFC.

area, large multi-purpose room and computer room. Work is currently being carried out in order to finish a library and scientific laboratory.

Managing Director, Dr Benoit Goossens, initially proposed the idea to Sabah Wildlife Department and Cardiff University back in 2006, and managed to secure the £75,000 needed to start work on the project. Funding was

provided by Cardiff University to pay for the building renovations, equipment and staff. Dr Goossens said that the hardest part was getting the construction materials to the site. "They were bought in Sandakan, then had to be taken 80km to Batu Putih, before being transported by boat to the centre."

The students from Cardiff spent two weeks developing...
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DANAU GIRANG FLIES OFF TO A COLOURFUL START...

Sixty-one species of butterfly were identified at Danau Girang during the Cardiff University field course.

A week of hard graft in the sun was what it took to capture these insects, followed by hours of sitting in front of a computer with a field guide and hundreds of photographs to work through. This wasn't enough to put off Ms Sarah Rowlands and Verity Huxtable of the butterfly division though. Under the supervision of Dr William Oliver Christian

Symondson, former BBC television presenter, the pair not only identified the butterflies using their common and Latin names, but also honoured many with a third, more descriptive name. Examples of such are the 'Mobile Phone Butterfly' and 'Verity's Face'.



The White Egg Fly Butterfly.



The cleverly named 'Verity's Face' on Verity's Face.

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IN OTHER NEWS:

- ◆ Frog enthusiasts searched for amphibians by night, finding a large array of frog species for identification.
- ◆ Botanists recorded information about each of the botanical plots at Danau Girang for future analysis.
- ◆ A one-day jungle safety course was run at Danau Girang with the arrival of the students from Cardiff.

DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?

"Am I pregnant?"

- Prof. Mike Bruford

DANAU GIRANG OPENS IT'S DOORS FOR THE FIRST TIME...

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...fieldwork skills and working on individual projects as part of their undergraduate biology, ecology or zoology courses.

Staff from the Kinabatangan Orangutan Conservation Project (KOCP) were on hand to aid the students with their field work. Mislin, Eddie and Azman shared their jungle knowledge with the group, most of whom had no previous experience of the tropical rainforest. The students had received a day of survival training at the beginning of their stay, but spectacular falls from Helen Pitt whilst attempting to cross a

stream, and Verity Huxtable, who had not mastered getting into a boat safely by the end of the trip, demonstrated the difficulties of working in a different environment.

DGFC was praised by everyone involved. "It's an amazing place" said Donald A'Bear, a sentiment shared by the rest of the students, many of whom wish to return in the future.



Left: Aled Evans undergoes survival training.



Above: Tory Hazell takes a trip on the Kinabatangan River

Below: Insect trapping



IN SEARCH OF BIRDS

It's been well publicized that the bird group got off to a slow start, on one day having a total bird count as low as zero, but things eventually started to look up for the birders who caught 9 in one netting session towards the end of the fortnight.

When asked how she felt about this tremendous catch, Chloe Parker, member of the bird team, said "hang on, I need to think of something good to say because you'll quote me."

By the end of the course, a

"The bird team has proven the existence of birds in the Kinabatangan."

range of avifauna caught, ringed and released from Danau Girang showed the diversity of birdlife in the area to be high. Birds observed in the two weeks included the Emerald Dove,

Rufus-backed Kingfisher and the tiny Flowerpecker.

Some attribute

the sudden flurry of bird activity to the arrival of a group of primatologists, bringing good fortune upon the operation. The success of the ornithologists has finally proven the existence of birds in the Kinabatangan, which for several, troublesome days seemed unlikely.

Right: Richard Howell rings a kingfisher.



STUCK IN THE MUD

Studying hornbills is not an easy task, as Ms Kate Philpot and Helen Gath found out.

As part of their project on the magnificent birds, the two girls were required to leave the relative stability of the boat for the muddy banks of the Kinabatangan River. On several occasions the pair found themselves to be well and truly stuck in the deep mud of the riverbank. At such times, Dr Benoit Goossens and the boat-based team member had to engage in rescue action once the laughter had subsided.

The person most affected by these

antics, however, was not studying hornbills for her project. When Ms Rowlands of the entomology team offered to lend a hand with the survey, it is unlikely that she expected her Wellington boot to be engulfed by the riverbank, but this was exactly the fate of the unfortunate footwear.

The Kinabatangan is home to several species of hornbill, including the pied hornbill, rhinoceros hornbill and wrinkled hornbill



Hornbill in flight.

THE 'DANAU GIRANG BUMBLEBEE MOUSE'

More than 50 small mammals were trapped in four days at Danau Girang Field Centre.

After a week of preliminary studies where mammal counts failed to reach double figures, optimism was severely lacking when the small mammal team embarked upon their project. Mr Donald A'Bear had so little confidence in the study that he was willing to take up a subscription to the unusual British magazine 'Psychic Weekly' if they managed to capture one animal in each of the 44 traps during the five day study. "We won't catch more than 32 mammals," Mr A'Bear confidently told a Jungle Times reporter.

The rest of the small mammal team, Rebecca Cope and Zoe Deakin, took a more positive approach, and were delighted to confirm that the mammal count taken at 11:52 on Tuesday 29th

July 2008 stood at 29 individuals. The study was to run until Thursday.

As well as catching the expected small mammals, including the red spiny rat, much to the birders' amazement the team also caught a misguided hooded pitta. "The small mammal group have been stealing our birds!" accused Dr Ian Vaughan of Cardiff University.

The animal that caused the biggest stir, however, was a small, stripy mouse. The mouse, nicknamed the 'Danau Girang Bumblebee Mouse', was not found in any field guide and could not be positively identified by staff and students at Danau Girang, and so the possibility of having discovered a 'new' species remains.

The small mammal team were pleasantly surprised by the number of mammals caught. Of the 44 traps set on

Sunday 27th July, by Thursday lunch-time a statement was released to declare that at the first count, 52 small mammals and one bird had been captured. The editor of 'Psychic Weekly' is said to be eagerly looking forward to its first subscriber.



The 'Danau Girang Bumblebee Mouse', so called due to its stripy fur coat.

MONKEY BUSINESS

Students travelled the river in search of monkeys and apes, setting off from the Danau Girang jetty.

The surveys took place early in the morning and before sunset whilst the animals were waking and settling down for the night.

Most abundant were long-tailed macaques, closely followed by proboscis monkeys. Silvered langurs were

The silvered langur starts life as a bright orange infant, before developing its characteristic silver coat.

also spotted, including the occasional mother with a bright orange baby. The less common morph of the monkey which appears pinky-orange in colour was also sighted, as well as two groups of pig-tailed macaques and one orangutan.

Back at Danau Girang, Alexandra Hale from Cardiff University worked with the Proboscis

Team, Milena Lynn and David Stanton, who have been studying Borneo's iconic proboscis monkey as part of an ongoing project.



Long-tailed Macaque

The students were also treated to a visit from Kinabatangan Orangutan Conservation Project director, Marc Ancrenaz, who gave a presentation about primate conservation in the area.

CROC' SPOTTING

Following a talk about crocodiles from Prof. Abdul Hamil Ahmad, from Universiti Malaysia Sabah, groups of Cardiff University students went out searching for reptiles on the Kinabatangan River.

Up to five students were taken out on the river each evening to find crocodiles using a powerful searchlight. Crocodiles can be seen towards the riverbanks, and are easily spotted by looking along the waterline for pairs of eyes reflecting the torchlight.



Helen Pitt keeps an eye out for crocodiles.



A large crocodile.

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Danau Girang Field Centre

*Danau Girang Field Centre was opened in July 2008.
It is located in the Lower Kinabatangan Wildlife Sanctuary,
Sabah, Malaysia.*

Danau Girang is owned by the Sabah Wildlife Department and supported by Cardiff University. Its purpose is to further scientific research with the aim of contributing to long-term conservation projects in the area, and develop a better understanding of our environment and the living things we share it with.



Students sample invertebrates by night at DGFC.

ORANGUTAN!

An orangutan attracted huge crowds of students at the Danau Girang Field Centre earlier this month.

Hoads of people gathered beneath the great ape, which was enjoying some afternoon tea in the tree-tops. As pieces of half-chewed fruit fell to the ground, spectators dodged the debris in a desperate attempt to get a photograph of Borneo's majestic ape.

Amongst the panic to reach the scene of the sighting, were incredible stories of courage, loyalty and bravery. One lady, Miss Zoe Deakin, embarked upon a high-speed journey through the treacherous forest to reach a group of stranded botanists. Racing through the undergrowth, the scientists reached the ape just in time, but not without sacrifice. Laura Davies, Cardiff, fell several times in the chaos, however



An orangutan decides to join the field course.

through the scene, alarming both the orang-utan and the startled general public. When asked how she felt about the orangutan's visit, Ms Huxtable replied that she was "ecstatic!"

One person in particular was very happy about the sighting. In an official statement, Dr Goossens declared "I am glad because you are no longer going to bother me every day with *assumes squeaky voice* "I haven't seen an orangutan, I haven't seen an orangutan!"

there were no serious casualties.

The animal soon became used to the excited crowd after initially seeming a little distressed, possibly due to a jealous onlooker taking extreme measures to steal the limelight. Verity Huxtable, 21, streaked



Excited students.



Danau Girang Field Centre