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V.I.P Visit



Top: Enjoying a walk along the path. Bottom left: Arriving at the jetty; right: admiring Benoit's tree house!

We had a short but sweet visit from a group of Very Important People in the world of Kinabatangan wildlife conservation this month, who stopped by for a lovely lunch in the jungle to see what DGFC is all about. The Deputy Director of the Wildlife Department, and the Assistant Minister

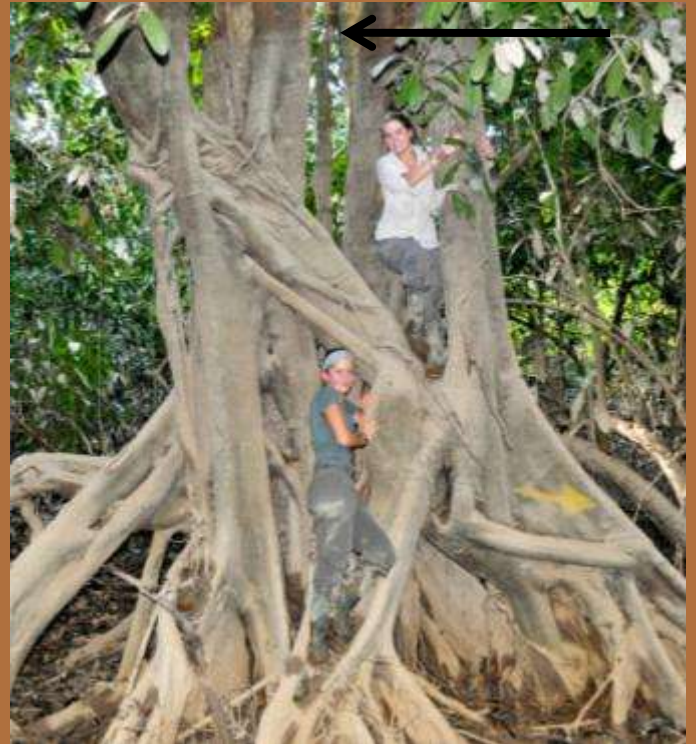
of Tourism, Culture and Environment, YB Datuk Ellron A. Angin, were among the group that had a quick nose around the DGFC buildings, and they seemed most happy and impressed with what we have going. DGFC works in conjunction with the Wildlife Department to conserve the

beautiful environment of the Kinabatangan rainforest by helping further understanding of the biodiversity here, and bring awareness to the existence and importance of the conservation of the local animals and habitats which are so precious.



The Flooding Aftermath

The floods have finally receded, leaving behind a wake of destruction! As the water goes down it is taking the banks of the river along with it, eroding them away at a surprising rate. It has also caused problems with the water pump, meaning a few smelly days without a shower! The trails have also all had to be cleared and repainted as the muddy flood water has washed away or obscured almost all the markings, making for some hairy moments where you can't see any marked trees, and although not exactly lost... aren't really sure where you are! It's been quite surprising seeing the water marks on the trees, showing just how high the water did rise.



This shows the water level along one of the trails, higher than both Jen and Alice in the tree!

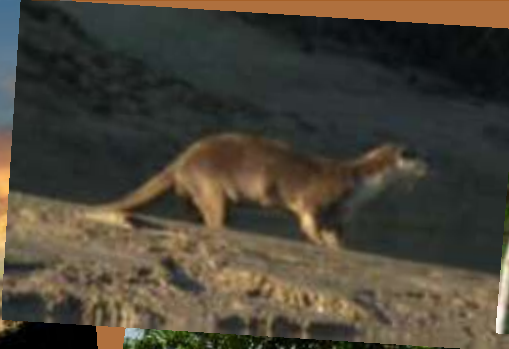
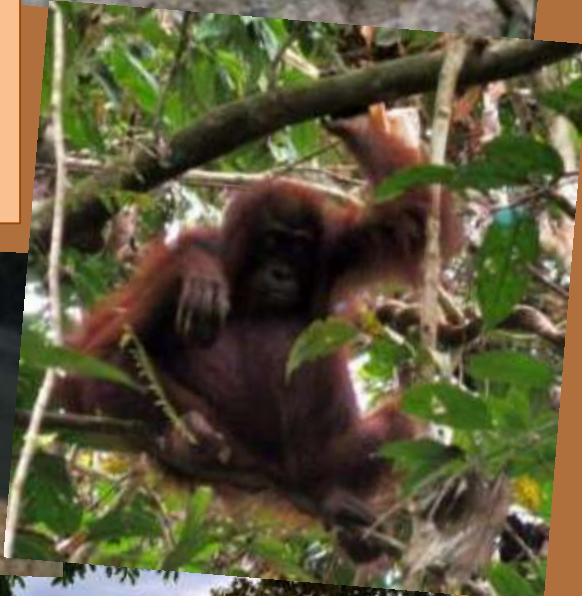
Ooh La La - Its Thibaut!



This month saw the arrival of the newest member of the DGFC crew; Thibaut Foch, 23, from France (haw-he-haw!). Thibaut is half way through his degree in Forestry Engineering and has just spent three months having a jolly old time studying forest management in Costa Rica, but has now come to spend the rest of his work experience year at Danau Girang! He will be giving the tree plots a much needed make-over, as well as developing some more tree plots near where the old Uncle Tan site was, and will be working in conjunction with DGFC friend Marc Ancrenaz in Sukau. Thibaut will also be giving a much needed helping hand on other projects running at DGFC, such as studies on local frog species. Let's just hope he doesn't try and eat them, he is French after all.



PHOTO ALBUM
From top left
clockwise: little
Ridzwan's favourite
game; Jen and Thibaut
manhandling a fish;
sunset in Sandakan;
lizard; a sleepy orang-
utan; sitting by the
river; an otter; pretty
sunset; strange green
spider!



Species of Interest:

Malayan Box Turtle (*Testudo amboinensis*)

Appearance: The Malayan Box Turtle is easily recognised by a well-developed plastral hinge, which is a mechanism they use to be able to close up their shell completely! (Handy for avoiding predators) They have bright yellow/orange stripes on their face and a high-domed, smooth, olive or brownish black shell.



Behaviour: This turtle is the most common in Borneo and probably why it is the most commonly eaten. It is very adaptable as it can survive in almost any habitat; ponds, mangrove swamps, freshwater marshes, canals, streams and rice fields! We decided to use the Malayan Box Turtle for the *Species of Interest* this month after seeing a couple amongst the streams and trails around DGFC. They were pretty shy though and frantically tried burrowing themselves under the available leaves and stream debris, but fortunately for them, we weren't trying to eat them.

Distribution: N.E India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, Nicobar, Sumatra, Borneo, Java, Sulawesi, Ceram, Ambon and the Philippines.

A Treat From Tibo...!

QUIZ: Rhinoceros Hornbill
A horn, what for?



Ⓐ to sleep in the best position



Ⓑ to travel with baby

Ⓒ to play "bilboquet"



Ⓓ to make humans talk



Tibo

How to: Repaint a trail

When the trees get muddy you can't see the paint, and when you can't see the paint – you get lost.

So. To repaint a trail....

1. Take a load of paint (of the same colour, else things get confusing) and a large brush. Be prepared for trousers and T-shirts to get covered.
2. Paint a strip on each side of a tree about 3m apart (don't use up too much paint making pretty pictures else there won't be enough to last to the end).
3. Where necessary, tie plastic ribbons to trees to make them more obvious.
4. Don't paint over animals. They don't like it.
5. Make sure you stick to the path intended, don't wander off in a new direction et voila! – a newly painted trail to guide you through the dark nights.



Forensics and Family



We had a lovely visit this month from Jen Mailley and her parents John and Sue. Jen is a forensic scientist working in Kuala Lumpur for TRACE, a wildlife forensics network, part of the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland. Her work is very important in preventing the export of rare animals or animal merchandise such as fur and horns. They got very wet on a boat trip, nice and sweaty on some jungle walks and had a generally fun time. Jolly good.

Emma Arrives...

Emma Morgan (22) has just graduated from Cardiff University and is enjoying a couple of months volunteering here before exploring more of South East Asia. She will be collecting some preliminary information on fish parasites in the Kinabatangan at Danau Girang. She has been busy learning to fish, and getting over her squeamish-ness of them!



In Other News:

- A new trail was painted over on the Uncle Tan side of the oxbow lake, which follows the other side of the lake round and has some very pretty views! The new trail has been named the Kingfisher trail, and has become a favourite of the pty students!
- The pty students have been busy helping Thibaut count trees, starting the big job of re-doing the tree plots.

Did they really say that.....?!?!

Budin, whilst looking down a microscope at fish parasites:
“I feel drunk.. I can see Britney Spears dancing!”

Conservation Corner: Shark Finning

Sharks are pretty tough creatures. Not just because they have big sharp teeth that would bite through bones like butter and the speed to attack their prey before you can blink; but because they are survivors.

The Chondrichthyan class of fish that the Shark belongs to (along with batoids and chimaeras) has survived on Earth and successfully reradiated after two major periods of extinction – the Permian-Triassic and Cretaceous-Tertiary transitions. Chondrichthyan fish are found in every ocean niche: deep or shallow, coral or coastal, hot or cold and salt or fresh and range from a mere 10cm to a colossal 20m.

Sharks survive everywhere, so why have these resilient creatures come up this month in conservation corner? *The answer is shark fin soup.*

Unfortunately, what was useful during evolution is not so useful now: slow growth, late maturity and low rates of population increase now make sharks more vulnerable to human exploitation. The rapid expansion of the shark fin trade over the past 30 years has led to widespread shark finning – essentially catching a shark, cutting off its fins, throwing it back in the water and leaving it to bleed to death with no

chance of survival. Fishing is by far the largest cause of Shark depletion worldwide. Few shark populations now remain unexploited or are given the opportunity for recovery, the ever increasing number of catches from the 1950s when around 200,000t of global landings were recorded to around 828,364t in 2000 has led to a rapid decline in populations. It has been noted for a number of years now that the sharks populations found off coastal reefs around Borneo and other areas of SE Asia are declining.



Some divers put this absence down to shark's dislike for the bubbles produced by divers, and as the number of divers is increasing the number of sharks is decreasing. But the numbers are hard to argue with. Research conducted by Shelley Clarke estimates that globally, between 26 million to 73 million sharks are being slaughtered annually for the fish-trade, a large percentage of which are used to provide the subtle taste to the Chinese delicacy that is shark fin soup. Shark fin soup was established as a traditional component of formal banquets by the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). The consumption of shark fins was discouraged in China under Mao Tse-tung but then suddenly became popular again in 1987, sparking a huge demand. Serving shark fin for Chinese banquets and business dinners is now common place, and it is expected to grow over time. Effective shark conservation measures however are extremely lacking, some progress is being made by

the FAO International Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks but it is slow. The absence of fisheries management, conservation measures and reliable data to guide sustainable fisheries is a problem in shark population decline. There are a lot more conservation and management tools available – the problem is generating the political will to implement these tools. A Status Survey is being formed to set the stage for a Conservation Action Plan which will be updated on the SSG website <http://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/fish/organizations/ssg/ssg.htm>. This will identify priorities and a global strategy for the conservation of sharks and their relatives. Without such initiatives, shark populations and the fisheries they support will not be viable for much longer. Other places have taken action against the selling and consumption of shark fin – Gayana Eco Resort declared their abstinence from shark fin

products in 2008 at it's Alu Alu Seafood Restaurant in Kota Kinabalu. NBA basketball star Yao Ming has shown his distaste for the cruel cuisine by starring in a Chinese advert in which he sends back a bowl of shark fin soup in a restaurant. Steve Trent, president of Wild Aid says "China alone can save the sharks, if sharks are to survive we need to see a decline in shark fin consumption and new actions by government to control imports and consumption." So if Shark Fin Soup or Shark Steak comes up on the menu, remember the millions of slaughtered, maimed sharks with drawn out deaths and go for the chicken option instead.



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.*

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