

THE JUNGLE TIMES



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TWO LEOPARD CATS

Amanda, one of the field centre's Research Officers and PhD students, recently caught and collared two new male leopard cats (*Prionailurus javanensis*) with the support of the field assistants and our resident veterinarian. These cats were captured in the surrounding oil palm plantations of Subok and Pendirosa, where Amanda has built a successful long-term working relationship.

The emergence of GPS tracking has revolutionised wildlife conservation studies, providing researchers with unparalleled insights into animal behaviour. By equipping animals with small, lightweight GPS devices, scientists can now monitor their movements in real-time and estimate the speed of their travels, enabling more precise data collection and analysis.

Through consistent tracking, researchers can gradually unveil important ecological patterns which can then inform conservation strategies aimed at safeguarding these vulnerable species. Amanda is eager to collar more leopard cats in the near future and hopes to extend her efforts to include the rare and elusive flat-headed cat (*Prionailurus planiceps*).



A SAD DISCOVERY

In February, the field centre was very saddened to discover the body of an adult male orangutan (*Pongo pygmaeus*), believed to be approximately 10 years old, that was found floating on the Kinabatangan River at the Lower Kinabatangan Wildlife Sanctuary.

The body was brought to land, and a post-mortem was conducted by the veterinarian on site at the centre, being the nearest to where the body was found. The cause of death could not be identified at the time of the post-mortem and still remains a mystery pending further laboratory studies of the tissue samples taken at the time.

The Minister of Tourism, Culture and Environment, Datuk Christina Liew, later gave credit to DGFC for its swift action in carrying out the post-mortem.



FURTHER COLLABORATION

Research staff from DGFC, including Hong Kong University's pangolin team and DGFC's Research Assistants (completing their Professional Training Year), recently met with representatives from Sawit Kinabalu SDN BHD. They met to discuss the fascinating journey of a radio-tagged pangolin that was translocated and released in Lot 7 of the Lower Kinabatangan Wildlife Sanctuary (LKWS). The pangolin vanished after three days, only to reappear 11 days later in a burrow at the Sungai Pin Conservation Area (SgPCA), approximately 3.2 kilometers away. Remarkably, it must have crossed the Kinabatangan River at least once during its journey!

Following this discovery, Sawit Kinabalu's Conservation and Biodiversity Unit (CBU) and DGFC have initiated plans to collaborate. Their focus lies on studying the ecology of Sunda pangolins and small wild cats within Sawit Kinabalu's landscape along the Kinabatangan River, as well as the surrounding areas of the Sungai Pin Estate, SgPCA, and the Mansuli Hill.

We will continue to update our readers on the progress of this project as it unfolds.



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STUDENT RESEARCH PROJECTS: PROFESSIONAL TRAINING YEAR

WILL EVANS

Hi! I'm Will, a student from Cardiff University's School of Biosciences, conducting a research project on the dietary habits of the Sunda pangolin (*Manis javanica*). My research focuses on uncovering the variations in ant and termite diversity across different habitats which are frequented by the Sunda pangolin. Currently, I've set up traps and begun conducting habitat assessments in my designated sampling areas.

To investigate the pangolin's diet, I'm utilizing data on the home ranges of tracked pangolins generously provided by the resident research team from University of Hong Kong, whom I'm collaborating with. Within each of these home ranges, I'm establishing 10 quadrats measuring 5 by 5 meters. Within these quadrats, I'm setting up three pitfall traps, baited with sugar water. Additionally, each cup contains 50ml of soapy water to dispatch the ants, allowing for species identification back at the field centre's laboratory. This project aims to deepen our understanding of the Sunda pangolin's ecology and I'm eagerly anticipating the outcomes of my research and how it will contribute to future efforts in pangolin conservation.



ALYSSA WHITTLE

Hello, I'm Alyssa, a student from Cardiff University's School of Biosciences. I'm currently undertaking my research project as a Professional Training Year student at the field centre. I'm approximately two months into my project, which focuses on studying how the use of red and white light affects the natural behaviours of nocturnal mammals. Specifically, I'm comparing two types of sites: natural forest reserves and our Regrow Borneo restored forest sites.

For this project, I'm collaborating with Dr. Priscillia Miard (Universiti Malaysia Sabah), whose talk on her night spotting project at the Borneo Bird Festival 2023 initially sparked my interest. With the support of Professor Benoit Goossens, I am already identifying patterns in my data, such as red light leading to longer observation times and certain areas exhibiting higher diversity.

Spotting the slow loris and being approached by a mouse deer during my research work in the forest was a particular highlight! I am really enjoying my project so far, and I am excited to see the outcomes of my data.



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MAZ IN MEXICO

Maz Jumail, a Research Officer at DGFC and PhD student, is currently traveling in Mexico as part of her prestigious Merdeka Award. During a recent fieldtrip to Desierto de los Leones National Park, accompanied by Dr. Juan Pablo and his two students, Maz learnt how Dr Pablo and his team were studying how the genetic diversity is distributed within forest areas, which have been affected by wildfires and ozone pollution, to identify tolerant species using genomic data.

Maz also presented a lecture about her own restoration project in the Kinabatangan at the Institute of Ecology of Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico.

A VISITOR FROM SWEDEN

Dr. Karl-Olof Bergman, a visiting Conservation Biologist and senior lecturer from the University of Linköping, Sweden, was particularly interested in Sabah's conservation strategies, especially regarding the impact of oil palm plantations on the natural forest and its effects on the habitat and biodiversity.

Dr. Bergman appreciated the centre's work and acknowledged its close working relationship it has with the local community, not only through direct employment but also our on-going conservation initiatives such as the Regrow Borneo Project. Discussions with staff and students raised the many issues surrounding conservation and economic development and the future possibilities for collaboration.



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PUBLICATIONS

On the island of Borneo, Sabah once had one of the most numerous populations of bearded pigs. However, African swine fever has led to the decline of this population by 90%-100% and this collapse in numbers poses unknown ecological damage.

MEIJAARD E, ERMAN A, ANCRENAZ M, GOOSSENS B, 2024. Pig virus imperils food security in Borneo: Science, Volume 383: Issue 6680: www.doi.org/10.1126/science.adn3857



A recent (March 2024) camera trap picture of a small herd of bearded pigs taken in the vicinity of Kulamba Forest Reserve showing that the species is slowly recovering (Credit: DGFC).



A large bearded pig male in the Kinabatangan prior to ASF outbreak (Credit: Rudi Delvaux).

PHOTO & CAMERA TRAP HIGHLIGHTS



Bornean elephant (*Elephas maximus borneensis*) on the banks of the Kinabatangan.
Taken by: William Evans



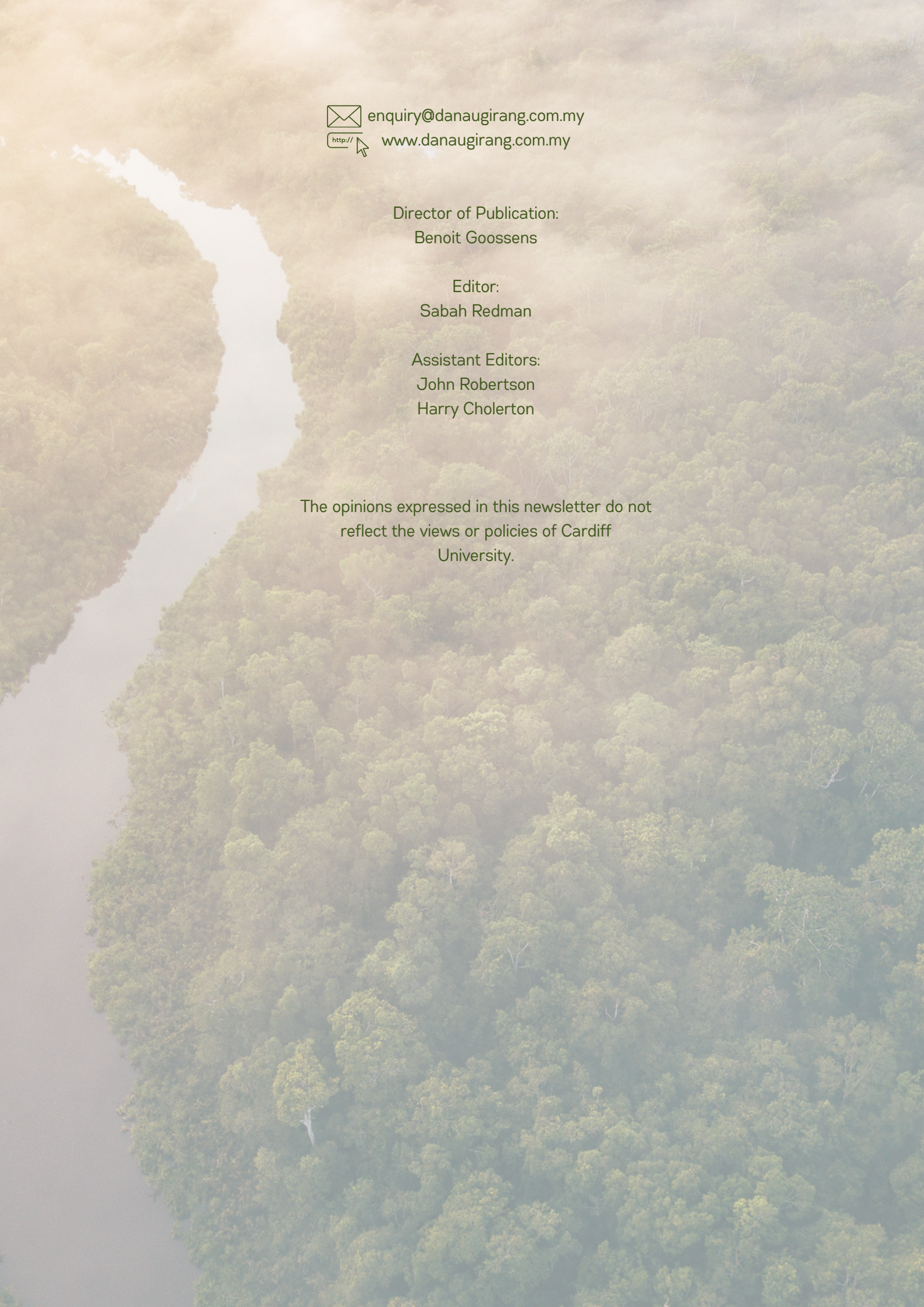
A sleepy rufous piculet woodpecker (*Micropternus brachyurus*) spotted inside a tree hollow along DGFC's main path.
Taken by: William Evans.





A dark eared tree frog (*Polypedates macrotis*) about to leap from a tree.
Taken by: William Evans

A flanged male orangutan (*Pongo pygmaeus*) lounging in the trees above the main path.
Taken by: William Evans





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