



PRESS RELEASE

They used to hunt wild forest animals using traps, now they protect them thanks to camera traps

5 September 2022 - **Poaching is one of the main causes of species loss. The Kukang Rescue Program in the north of the island of Sumatra fights against illegal hunting and trade in wild animals. As part of cooperation with local communities, the program employed two former poachers of slow lorises and pangolins, who became field conservationists. They have now extended their excellent skills of orientation in the forest and monitoring of endangered wild animals with modern elements used in nature conservation - the installation and control of camera traps. Among other things, the camera traps recently captured the critically endangered Sumatran orangutan and the rare Asiatic golden cat.**

In Indonesia, like all over the world, wild nature is disappearing more or less quickly, and with it disappears the space for wild animals. However, wildlife is decreasing also due to other influences, such as poaching. [The Kukang Rescue](#) Program operates in the north of the island of Sumatra in Indonesia, where it mainly deals with the protection of slow lorises and other endangered species that naturally occur in this area. An integral part of these efforts is cooperation with local people, who often make a living by hunting animals, including endangered and rare species. *“When you meet poachers in these areas, you will be surprised that they are people who know nature and often have a positive attitude towards animals. The worse are smugglers who buy animals from poachers and resell them not only on the local but also on the international market,”* explains František Příbrský, head of the Kukang program. Over time, the Kukang Rescue Program recruited two former poachers into its team, who are now an important part of the program’s conservation activities. These former poachers live in a remote village on the edge of the Leuser Protected Ecosystem, which includes the Gunung Leuser National Park - the only place on earth where Sumatran orangutans, elephants, tigers, and rhinos live together. *“Kaban and Wahyudi were able to catch up to 40 slow lorises every month, as well as many other wild animal species. However, hunting was an uncertain business and did not make them happy. When they discovered that they could end poaching and protect these animals instead, they were very happy. But before they became legitimate members of the team, we tested their abilities and also whether they really didn't poach anymore. That was 7 years ago,”* states Lucie Čižmářová, coordinator of veterinary care of the Kukang program.

The employment of these men in conservation really made a big difference. Not only did they stop hunting wild animals themselves, but they even started checking that other members of their community did not do so either. Many of these community members have joined the project called [Kukang Coffee](#), within which the Kukang program buys their coffee beans for a higher price than what they would get on the local market. In exchange, however, they had to contractually commit to ending the hunting and killing of protected wild animals. And it is the observance of this agreement that the former poachers Kaban and Wahyudi monitor as part of their work.

For the past three years, this team has also been engaged in regular monitoring of nocturnal animals around the village, collecting data that will show how the population of these animals is really doing. *“We have learned to track animals and collect comprehensive data that will then help us protect these animals. In one evening, we are able to find up to several slow lorises, often even in the vicinity of the village. It is therefore obvious that after the end of the hunting activities, the animals feel safe here and come back,”* explains Kaban, the former hunter of slow lorises.

An auxiliary method, and the imaginary culmination of the transformation of the former poachers into nature conservationists, is the deployment of camera traps. Kaban and Wahyudi are now the ones who install and regularly check camera traps in locations where wild animals move. *“We would like to capture the Sunda pangolin, which is found here, on a camera trap, but unfortunately the numbers of these animals have decreased dramatically in recent years,”* says Wahyudi, who previously specialized in hunting pangolins with the help of trained dogs. But he sold the dogs and has not been hunting pangolins for a long time. He saw with his own eyes how much more difficult it is to find these mysterious animals year after year, and thanks to the Kukang program he got the chance to devote himself to their protection. However, the team managed to capture other endangered and rare animals on the camera trap, such as the Sumatran orangutan (*Pongo abelii*), shown in the video [here](#), or the Asiatic golden cat (*Catopuma temminckii*), which can be seen in the video [here](#). *“We have never seen some animals, such as the Asiatic golden cat, with our own eyes. Seeing them at least on a camera trap video is something amazing. We are glad that these and other creatures still live in our forests. It shows us that there is still something to protect and something to fight for,”* says Jhon Gurusinga, coordinator of activities in the field area of the Kukang program.

The camera traps were purchased thanks to the financial support of the partner German organization [Plumploris e.V.](#), which also focuses on the protection of slow lorises.

Asiatic golden cat (*Catopuma temminckii*) inhabits the tropical forests and subtropical forests of Southeast Asia. It is a threatened species and its numbers in the wild continue to decline due to it being hunted for illegal wildlife trade and habitat loss. Even though it belongs to CITES I (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) and is protected in most of the countries where it occurs, including Indonesia, it is still being poached, mainly for the fur trade. This applies to both the national and international markets.

The attached photos may be freely used for print, internet and television news purposes.
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