

## PRESS RELEASE

# Kukang field team at the mercy of the Sumatran jungle, with a tiger behind

10 August 2023 - Throughout its almost ten-year operation in the field of protecting slow lorises from illegal trade in Sumatra, Indonesia, The Kukang Rescue Program has been working closely with the local community. With its team of local people, including former poachers, the Kukang Program installs camera traps as part of wildlife monitoring on the edge of the Leuser protected ecosystem. A few weeks ago, this team embarked on its most challenging, four-day expedition into the interior of the forest to place camera traps at a frequented place where animals come to drink. Despite a long, dangerous, and very arduous journey with no connection to the world and little prospect of success, the camera traps were finally set. A later check of the camera traps brought huge excitement - in addition to a female Sumatran orangutan with a baby and groups of other endemics, a Sumatran tiger also appeared in the pictures!

For almost 10 years, the team of The Kukang Rescue Program has been working in Sumatra, Indonesia, to protect slow lorises. A key tool is close cooperation with local residents, without which long-term effective nature protection is not possible. At the same time, the program focuses on a unique area on the edge of the protected Leuser ecosystem. In this field location in the north of Sumatra, the Kukang Program, therefore, created a well-functioning conservation team consisting of local people, including former poachers, which began to use, among other things, camera traps as part of monitoring the local wild animals in the area. *“We first started installing camera traps near our partner village to find out what animals share the same environment with slow lorises and how often they occur there. After some time, however, we received a message that deeper in the forest by the river there is a place where a large number of animals congregate to drink and lick the naturally occurring minerals. The installation of camera traps at this location was therefore clearly a logical step,”* says Lucie Čížmářová, head of monitoring activities of the Kukang Program.

The team, therefore, embarked on their most challenging, ultimately four-day expedition into the interior of the forest to place camera traps at the frequented drinking place on a river bank. The journey there was supposed to take one day. Due to the very difficult terrain and the ever-present thorny rattan, which the team had to literally cut their way meter by meter, the members of the expedition finally arrived at their destination in two days. Here the explorers camped on the bank of a large river and proceeded with camera traps for about 1.5 km upstream of a smaller river to where the animals congregate, and set camera traps there. Exhausted, but happy, they could set off on the two-day journey back.

After two months, the team returned to the forest to manually check the camera traps. Of the three camera traps, only two remained in place – one was stolen despite being secured with a lock, including the external battery buried underground. *“It is likely that the camera trap was stolen by some poachers, as it was placed deep in the forest, where ordinary people do not go. They were probably afraid of being exposed in the pictures. Fortunately, they didn’t find the other two camera traps,”* states field coordinator Jhon Kartasima Gurusinga. So, the team preferred to take the remaining two camera traps back to the

base. However, they were in for a big surprise in the photos. In addition to a group of critically endangered Sumatran orangutans (*Pongo abelii*), including a female with a baby, a herd of Malayan sambars (*Rusa unicolor equina*), and a large group of Thomas's langurs (*Presbytis thomasi*), a very rare Sumatran tiger (*Panthera tigris sumatrae*) also passed in front of the camera. In one of the videos, it even hunts a deer. *"It's great to see a tiger on video as these animals are highly endangered due to hunting and habitat loss. But it was a little scary to realize that we were camping not far from the camera trap. But it is a tiger's environment and is not owned by us, humans. The tiger is the king of the jungle here, so we should treat it with respect,"* reflects Kaban, a former hunter, now an animal conservationist and employee of the Kukang Program. A video of the tiger caught on camera can be viewed [here](#).

Camera traps were purchased thanks to the kind financial support of Zoo Zlín.

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The **Sumatran tiger** is the smallest living tiger subspecies (*Panthera tigris sumatrae*). It is critically endangered in its homeland, and the number of individuals living in the territory of Sumatra is estimated at around 400. Not only the destruction of their habitat but also intensive hunting brought the tiger to the very brink of extinction. Tiger bones and other parts of the tiger's body are highly valued "medicine" in traditional Chinese medicine. Tigers also often die in traps set for other animals, especially wild pigs, or are targeted for killing as animals potentially dangerous to humans.

The attached photographs are free to use for print, internet, and television news purposes; archive of The Kukang Rescue Program.

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