The Kukang Rescue Program, z. s.
Ostrovní 214, 500 09, Hradec Králové – Svinary
IČ: 05611717

project@kukang.org
www.kukang.org

PRESS RELEASE

The Kukang Rescue Program is celebrating an important milestone. They have been protecting slow lorises and other endangered species in Sumatra for 10 years!

17 October 2024 – **A decade has passed since the Czech-Indonesian Kukang Rescue Program on the island of Sumatra decided to devote immense efforts to protecting slow lorises, pangolins, and other endangered animals. During that time, they began to devote themselves to educating and involving local people in wildlife protection, building an international team of nature conservationists, monitoring wild animal populations, tracking and uncovering smugglers of illegal trade in endangered species, and cooperating with the authorities to confiscate animals. This initiative, thanks to which (not only) endangered slow lorises have more optimistic prospects for a better future, recalls this year what has been achieved in the past 10 years in an effort to change at least a small part of the world for the better. Symbolically, viewers of Czech Television will also be able to experience this journey through their screen this year.**

Since 2014, zoologists and conservationists from the Kukang team have been working to protect especially the endangered greater slow loris (*Nycticebus coucang*) and Sumatran slow loris (*Nycticebus hilleri*) - primates that, although they are the only venomous primates in the world, fall victim to their cuteness due to poaching for the pet trade. Czechs on the island of Sumatra in Indonesia founded The Kukang Rescue Program initiative to fight against the illegal trade in wild animals. "*Indonesia is undergoing rapid development, which is good on the one hand, but little financial and human resources are invested in nature conservation here. There is almost no environmental education in the country, little enforcement of conservation laws, animals are treated mostly as a commodity for profit, and the human population has been rapidly increasing. All of this causes a rapid decline in wildlife species there. And, even though Indonesia and its island of Sumatra is one of the world's hotspots of illegal wildlife trade, Sumatra, for example, did not have a specialized non-profit organization focused on the conservation of slow lorises until the creation of our program in 2014. Unfortunately, there are many more species on the fringes of interest,*" describes František Příbrský, the founder and director of the Kukang Program, his motivation for starting conservation work in Indonesia at that time.

In its 10 years of operation, Kukang has come a long way, during which it continues to develop mainly through cooperation with local communities. Since 2015, Kukang members have been teaching English and environmental lessons about nature, animals, and their conservation to children from the Bandar Baru village community at the English-environmental school called **"Kukang School"**. In addition, Kukang listened to the plea of the community of Basukum village, and in 2021, modelled after Kukang School, it helped them build their own English-environmental school for children, called "The School at the End of the World", which the Program now helps to run. This was followed in 2015 by the establishment of the **"Kukang Centre" for slow lorises** in Bandar Baru village, which serves as the base of the program as well as a specialized centre for the rehabilitation of slow lorises seized from the illegal trade to return them into the wild. However, the rehabilitation of slow lorises is currently not in operation.
Since 2016, the Program has been **employing former poachers** of slow lorises and pangolins, from whom a field team of conservationists was assembled. "*Former poachers Kaban and Wahyudi were able*

The Kukang Rescue Program, z. s.
Ostrovní 214, 500 09, Hradec Králové – Svinary
IČ: 05611717

project@kukang.org
www.kukang.org

to catch several dozen slow lorises every month, as well as many other species of animals. However, hunting was uncertain, not very profitable, and did not please them in any way. When they discovered that they could quit poaching and protect these animals instead, they were happy about it. But before they became full members of the team, we tested their abilities and also checked whether they were not poaching anymore. That was 8 years ago," recalls Lucie Čižmářová, co-founder and coordinator of veterinary care and welfare in the Kukang Program. Thanks to this, it was subsequently possible to eliminate most of the hunting of endangered and protected animal species in one of the areas of the buffer zone in the southeast of the unique Gunung Leuser National Park in the north of Sumatra.

The creation of the **"Kukang Coffee"** project in 2018 was an extremely important milestone for both the Kukang Rescue Program and the absolute elimination of hunting in the aforementioned buffer zone area in the southeast of Gunung Leuser National Park. Within it, the Kukang Program established the "Kukang Coffee" community of coffee farmers, who observe the ban on hunting protected wildlife species, and in return, Kukang buys coffee from them at a favourable price for them. "*Thanks to the established coffee community, local people have more profit from their coffee and, at the same time, greater motivation and understanding to protect local endangered animal species. These farmers, who previously also occasionally hunted protected species, thus became conservationists. The project is working great, and our area has become a little paradise for these animals*," explains the Indonesian coordinator of the Kukang Coffee project, Jhon Kartasima Gurusinga. People in Europe can enjoy high-quality, conservationist "Kukang Coffee", too. Coffee from this area is imported to the Czech Republic, specifically to the Kukang Coffee café in Ústí nad Labem, which spreads this conservation story among the general public. However, Ústí nad Labem Zoo, Ostrava Zoo, Olomouc Zoo, and Na Hrádečku Zoo already offer it to their visitors in some of their stands; it is also purchased by Soumar Coffee in Pilsen, Buliro Club in Prague, Studio Harcovka in Frýdlant nad Ostravicí, and more are gradually being added.

A very important part of the comprehensive activities of the Kukang Program is the **regular monitoring of nocturnal wild animals**, which, since 2019, has been carried out according to a clearly defined methodology, thanks to which it is possible to estimate the size of the slow loris populations in a defined area and their fluctuations in the locations around the villages of Kuta Male, Bandar Baru, and Basukum. "*We have learned to track animals and collect comprehensive data that will then help us protect these animals. In one evening, we are sometimes able to find up to ten slow lorises, often even in the vicinity of the village or directly in it. So, it's obvious that after our hunting activities are over, the animals feel safe here, they come back here and raise their young here as well*," explains Kaban, a former slow loris hunter who is now a field assistant for the program working in the Kuta Male location. **Camera traps** are an additional monitoring method that field workers of the Kukang Program have been using since last year. "*Some animals, such as the Sumatran tiger or Asian golden cat, we have never been able to see with our own eyes. Seeing them at least in camera trap footage 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 Wahyudi, a former pangolin hunter and current Kukang Program field assistant.

In addition, since 2022, Kukang, with the help of illegal wildlife trade investigators, has been **actively fighting against smugglers** to punish them and confiscate the smuggled animals or their parts. On this, it collaborates, among others, with Ofir Drori, an Israeli conservationist and founder of the network of the international organization EAGLE, which fights against illegal wildlife trade on a large scale in Africa. One of the significant successes was the arrest of a large smuggler of pangolins, primates, reptiles, and other animals nicknamed Greed, whom an international team led by Czech nature

The Kukang Rescue Program, z. s.
Ostrovní 214, 500 09, Hradec Králové – Svinary
IČ: 05611717

project@kukang.org
www.kukang.org

conservationists in Sumatra managed to catch after four months of intensive investigation and evidence gathering. "*I am very happy about this raid in Sumatra. Exactly such actions are needed. Less talk and more traffickers behind bars. The arrest of this smuggler in Indonesia is very rewarding indeed, as ports in Southeast Asia account for a large proportion of the illegal wildlife trade. Additionally, every arrest of a wildlife smuggler sends a message to other criminals. I hope that this event will also have a far-reaching impact,*" said Ofir Drori. Other captures followed - smugglers Iqbal, Katon, Mr. A, and others dealing in more than a thousand pig-nosed turtles and songbirds, such as Nias Hill mynas, cockatoos, and birds of paradise. It was also possible to confiscate several illegally kept siamangs and gibbons, a pangolin, slow loris, and binturong, and the Kukang team helped detain many other rare animals. Work to investigate the illegal trade in or possession of wild animals is still ongoing.

As an authentic calling card for the activities of the Kukang Rescue Program, the **"Kukang Movie: A Story about Slow Lorises and People"** was completed last year, a time-lapse documentary from the perspective of two documentarians who decided to capture the real story of nature conservation on the Indonesian island of Sumatra with an unmistakable Czech footprint. This year, this film will be shown on Czech Television, iVysílání, and on the newly emerging website of the documentary.

All the activities of the Kukang Rescue Program are possible mainly thanks to the long-term support of modern zoos, which have been its main partners since the Program's establishment. These are mainly Czech zoos, namely Ostrava Zoo, Olomouc Zoo, Liberec Zoo, Hodonín Zoo, Na Hrádečku Zoo, Ústí nad Labem Zoo, and Zlín Zoo, then it is the Polish Wroclaw Zoo, Dutch Ouwehands Zoo, and German NaturZoo Rheine. However, the German foundation Welttierschutzgesellschaft e.V. (WTG) is also an essential partner and sponsor.

Kukang online

In 2016, the international **campaign "I Am Not Your Toy!"** was launched to draw attention to the harmfulness of the popularization of slow lorises as pets on the Internet. Two years later, it was followed by **"Stolen Wildlife"**, the first comprehensive campaign in the Czech Republic highlighting the overlooked facts of illegal trade in wild animals and their body parts in the Czech Republic and throughout Europe. This initiative officially received the patronage of the Ministry of the Environment of the Czech Republic and the Customs Administration of the Czech Republic. More than two dozen Czech, Slovak, and other foreign zoos and other institutions have already displayed educational photo panels on the topic of illegal trade in wild animals.

The attached photos may be freely used for press, internet and television news purposes. Author: Lucie Čižmářová.

Kateřina Holubová

Chair and spokeswoman

The Kukang Rescue Program, z. s.

Tel.: +420 **777 153 133**

Email: holubova@kukang.org