



## Marike Ecotourism Development Initiative

### Progress Report

June 2011 – September 2011



**Yayasan Orangutan Sumatera Lestari – Orangutan Information Centre**

Kompleks TASBI BLOK RR98, Medan 20133 North Sumatera, Indonesia

[www.orangutancentre.org](http://www.orangutancentre.org)

[info@orangutancentre.org](mailto:info@orangutancentre.org)

## Executive Summary

MEDI is a grassroots programme to promote the protection of Sumatran orangutans (*Pongo abelii*) and their rainforest ecosystem, working with communities living next to the Marike region of the Gunung Leuser National Park (GLNP) in Sumatra. MEDI aims to support and inspire the local people to become guardians of the Leuser forests, protecting this invaluable ecosystem whilst also prospering through the creation of sustainable livelihoods.



The GLNP Authority has expressed its desire to develop Marike, in the Langkat district of North Sumatra, into an ecotourism site, and has requested our assistance due to the progress made in our analogous programme in Bukit Lawang. The forests at Marike host a population of purely wild orangutans (as opposed to rehabilitants in Bukit Lawang), as well as many natural wonders that can be viewed on jungle treks, such as stunning waterfalls and old-growth primary rainforest trees.

Figure 1 A panoramic view from Bukit Candi, Marike

We have been actively working in Marike with support from the Rufford Foundation since 2009, to develop sustainable livelihood schemes that serve both local development and environmental conservation needs. We have developed a model approach to working with communities living adjacent to the Leuser forests: community conservation action plans are developed through a participatory process, and then we provide bespoke training to support the community in enacting these plans. MEDI will build on this work to focus on ecotourism development in the region, with the community expressing commitment to establishing Marike as a new ecotourism site. We will also build awareness and appreciation within the community, and amongst national and international visitors, of the intrinsic value of forests, and the ecosystem services they provide.

The overall aim of the programme is to establish ecotourism as a sustainable development initiative, based on the natural beauty and biodiversity hotspots of the area. Through incorporating village-based, sustainable initiatives such as tree nurseries, forest restoration, and agroforestry demonstrations into the tourism spectrum, and not just focusing on trekking and ventures into protected areas, the visitor experience will be more holistic, conservation friendly, and also profitable and beneficial for local communities.

## Project Update

We have chosen as our base of operations the village of Kuta Gajah, Marike, and specifically the subvillage of Kinangkong-Simolap. However, for convenience we shall refer to the area simply as Kuta Gajah or Marike.

### i. MEDI Socialisation



We are developing the programme through a multi-stakeholder approach, involving the GLNP authority, the head of Kuta Gajah village and other village government leaders from the Marike area, the head of the local community tourism organisation, the Lembaga Pariwisata Simolap Lestari (LPSL) (Simolap Tourism Foundation), and of course local community members. This approach ensures that development plans are in-line with local needs and desires, and benefit a wide range of stakeholders.

Figure 2: Socialising MEDI in the village

Socialisation and coordination meetings were held between the GLNP Authority, = the village government, and the OIC. The programme's objectives were discussed, with everyone in agreement that ecotourism development should become a key part of the local economy and local conservation action. Agreements were reached on each stakeholder's role in reaching this goal, with the community especially enthusiastic about the prospect of forest guide training, as well as beginning work on restoring degraded areas of the national park.

We have drafted a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), stating the collective intention of responsible ecotourism development in the Marike region, which is now awaiting a final signature to become official.



Figure 3: The Wampu River area



## ii. Surveys

A tourism potential survey was carried out from 11 – 16 April 2011, by OIC staff and the GLNP authority. The following table details a number of sites of potential interest to visitors to the region:

No	Ecotourism site	Distance from Kuta Gajah
1	Lau Murak Hot Springs	6 km
2	Silan Sei Wampu Hot Springs	9 km
3	Terang (bright) Cave	8 km
4	Gelap (dark) Cave	9 km
5	Tangga-Tangga (stairs) Cave	5 km
6	Tawon (bee) Cave	2.5 km
7	Landak (porcupine) Cave	2.4 km
8	Wampu River	11 km
9	Ntebah River	7 km
10	Cih Lake	5.5 km
11	Teruh Waterfall	2.2 km
12	Ganjang Waterfall	7 km
13	Pengkuruken River	2 km
14	Bukit Candi Forest Area - apart from there being beautiful hill forest panoramas here, the area is also well known for its Kapal Kapalan plant, which is used in traditional medicines locally, for treating a sick stomach amongst other ailments, and is also said to be used in warding off evil spirits	7 km
15	Ring Mbelang Forest Area - this is the initial forest restoration site (25 hectares)	4 km
16	Parik Umang Forest Area - this is a primary forest area that has never been altered by local people, because they believe there are forest spirits living in the area, so it is a pristine site for trekking	4 km

There are between 30 - 50 hectares of national park forest in the Marike region in need of restoration, with some local people claiming that certain parts of the park are now dominated by grasses and therein considered degraded as a result of past encroachment. They have also informed us about a failed hydroelectric power initiative undertaken on behalf of a Japanese company in the 1970s, which apparently ended with an explosion, within the forest. A field survey is scheduled to take place in the next quarter, to investigate the full extent of degradation in the area.



Figure 4: Inside the Terang Cave

### iii. Focus Group Discussions (FGD) on Ecotourism Development



Figure 5: A FGD in progress

up to three times per week at local establishments, with 5-20 people present at each. These meetings shared the programme's goals to different sectors of the community, identified the collective expectations from different stakeholders, sought solutions to any problems raised, and developed strategies and created an agenda to achieve MEDI project goals and objectives.

One of the main barriers to community development in Marike has been a lack of coordination amongst stakeholders. Therefore a series of focus groups were held between the GLNP authority, LPSL, village government officials, and local community members, to bring these parties together and work collectively. The FGD style allows every interest group in the village to contribute to the development process. Meetings have been held on a formal basis once per week with approximately 20 people in attendance at each meeting. We have also held additional meetings

A workshop was also held at the Hermes Hotel in Medan in August, with approximately 40 participants, comprised of GLNP staff, heads of village government in the Marike area, members of LPSL, and OIC staff. The main outcome was a written agreement, explaining each stakeholders' role and responsibilities. .

### iv. Marike Ecotourism Council training

Although there is already a local community tourism organisation in Marike, the above-mentioned LPSL, they have



Figure 6: Local participants undergoing training

as yet not been active in developing the area into a tourism centre. We will provide training and capacity-building, and designate the group as the Marike Ecotourism Council (MEC), but operating under their already established name as the LPSL.

We have initiated the Field School training programme, utilising education techniques and environmental lesson themes learned through the OIC's previous involvement with the USAID Environmental Services Program (ESP)

([http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PNADL930.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADL930.pdf)) and also FIELD Indonesia (<http://www.field-indonesia.org>). This toolkit

takes full advantage of the resources that are available locally and works to develop new sustainable livelihoods that are in line with each community's needs and desires.

There are two main components to this tool:

a) the Sustainable Livelihood Assessment (SLA) module, to assess local development potentials, determine any weak points, and develop a community workplan for the future. In total there are 9 activities comprising the SLA,

including community driven biodiversity transects, village ecology and village potential assessments, which were all carried out from May to August 2011.

b) the SL (Village School) module, which will take up the remainder of the project year, and consist of implementing the community development plans drawn up in the SLA process.

#### v. Information Centre

There were a number of developments made in regards to constructing the information centre. Initially the village government was set to donate to the OIC 4 rantai (a rantai is a 400m<sup>2</sup> parcel of land) to build the centre, located in an ideal location approximately 300m from the Lau Murak Hot Springs. However, due to a series of complications, in terms of determining management and securing land-use rights, in the end we accepted an offer from a private landowner from the area, who offered us a nearby 1 rantai of his land to build the centre. Through this agreement there will be no conflict when new village governments are elected, and a contract is being drawn up with the private landowner detailing the agreed use of the land. The OIC will co-manage the information centre with the GLNP Authority.

Construction is scheduled to start in November 2011, with the intended design now based on a revised blueprint produced by an Eco-Architect intern from the National Taiwan University.



Figure 7: The intended design for the visitor centre

#### vi. Capacity-building

A series of practical training sessions will be held throughout the year, providing individual hands-on field training for the local people. Through the SLA process the local community has agreed to and requested the following training sessions: English language lessons, guide training sessions, trekking trail creation, ecological information about local fauna, flora, and natural forest processes, first aid / search and rescue training, including boat use for river rescue, cultural tourism training, with a focus on local Karonese traditions, handicraft production, basic landscaping and beautification for the areas surrounding the hot springs, parking area, etc., waste management training, human orangutan conflict mitigation training, natural forest restoration training, and use of conservation camps as a promotion tool for the Marike area.

A number of these, including visitor guide training, English language lessons, and ecology, have already been hosted, and have proven to be very popular.



Figure 8: Guide training

#### vii. Gunung Leuser National Park Forest Restoration



Figure 9: Filling polybags with soil at the community nursery

In September we built a tree nursery on an 8 x 10 m plot of land belonging to a member of the local community named Pak Mahadi Ginting. The nursery is still in the development phase, with thus far 3,000 polybags filled with a mix of soil and organic compost. Preparations have been made to begin planting, with the 10 hectares of GLNP land already demarcated and individual plots for seedlings cleared and marked. Before planting commences we will carry out, with the aid of the OIC's forest restoration specialist, a vegetation analysis of the surrounding forest. This will allow us to determine the local composition of trees present, and the species list of endemic trees to be planted in the park.

#### viii. Communal work

As a result of the MEDI programme, in September a new community group was formed, the Kuta Gajah Youth Group, consisting of approximately 25 local youths aged 17-25, sharing a common interest in assisting ecotourism development. This group shall, along with the LPSL, become key players in Marike, drumming up community support and helping steer the area towards a brighter, more prosperous future.



Figure 10: The Ntebah River



Figure 2 Fixing the broken bridge

After we explained the high standards of ecotourism expected in the area, from both the OIC's and prospective visitors' points of view, the youth group repaired a damaged bridge and organised a weekly beautification session to clean up rubbish from the area. We are hosting waste management sessions, with the local community having made a pledge to handle their waste more responsibly.

#### Conclusion

Over the next year we will train the community with the skills needed to manage and implement true, sustainable ecotourism, and we will support the restoration of national park forests which have been damaged by illegal encroachment. The programme will promote conservation amongst communities living adjacent to this area of high biodiversity, helping them protect and improve their livelihoods and, in the process, safeguard an ecosystem of vital importance in the global fight against climate change.



Figure 3 A wild Sumatran orangutan nest spotted in the Bukit Candi forest area