

## **Borneo bound for Eleanor Brealy, thanks to the OR Travel Bursary**

Myself and 24 other students from Swansea University arrived at Heathrow early, bright eyed and bushy tailed on April 23rd where we were greeted by our lecturers. We were handed out equipment and given an information handbook. My head could not keep thinking about the incredible trip and experience I had in store and it was actually happening. I had wanted to go on this field trip even prior to starting at Swansea! From Heathrow, we flew to Singapore Changi Airport. We had a lay-over of 14 hours, we got to have a tour of the beautiful city; it is known as a garden city due to its vibrant and consistent vegetation.

Our next flight was to Kota Kinabalu, 24<sup>th</sup> April, the capital of Malaysia's Sabah state in the northern part of the island of Borneo. We explored Kota Kinabalu's hustle and bustle at night. The next morning we had a Rainforest Health and Safety course meeting with Dr Glen Reynolds, you may have seen him in the Judy Dench program! Dr Reynolds introduced us to the conditions of the rainforest and an insight to the paradigm of palm oil. We then flew to Lahu Datu, flying over the majestic and impressive Mount Kinabalu. On this two propeller plane we got to witness the natural phenomenon - mass flowering of the rainforest, which looks like cauliflower in a forest of broccoli! Once landed we drove to Mount Silam and saw a pitcher plant and went up a watch tower for a breathtaking panoramic view over the canopy of the rainforest.

Later that evening we began our eventful drive to Danum Valley. Not only did three out of the four transfer vans get a burst tyre meaning we had to stop in the darkness with just the noises of the rainforest surrounding us - nothing like full immersion into something to make you get comfortable! We stopped at a palm oil plantation and got to see the impact on land erosion and hold a palm oil berry. Along the drive we got to see a python, frog- faced owl, moon rat, deer and centipedes.



Our group at Singapore, I am on the back row fourth from the left.



A pitcher plant.



Walking through a palm oil plantation, (left). Holding a palm oil berry (right).

On the 26th was my first morning in the jungle; as soon as I stepped outside the humidity hit me like a wave and I was certainly 'glowing'. We went for a rainforest walk where we were shown buttress roots, aerial roots, seeds and tiger leeches!





On my first morning, I was informed that an orangutan mother and child had been spotted next to the bridge that crosses the Segama river - this flows through Danum Valley Field Centre. We made our way swiftly over the bridge and I saw my first ever Orangutan; a truly breath-taking experience that I am so grateful to have witnessed. Throughout my time at Danum I spotted orangutans up the same tree three times.

In Danum Valley there is a phenomenon that only occurs every 10 years called mass flowering, which I mentioned earlier - 'cauliflowers'. This natural event creates the iconic landscape that is green with splashes of cream due to the flowering of cream flowers. This flowering event occurs in the Dipterocarp species and it is what can maintain the constant growth of the rainforest. On the 27<sup>th</sup> we walked through the Baru catchment where we saw selective logging and locations of landslides and soil pipes. We started the One Day project where we identified an area where logging had occurred and an untouched area. We measured a 10m transect and measured tree diameter 5m on each side. The next day we focused on Science and Communications and my group made a video about mass flowering. On the 29<sup>th</sup> we were blessed with a majestic sunrise which was greeted by the calls of gibbons and the hum of cicadas. After that sensory wake-up we saw the Malaysian meteorological centre. That afternoon, after a typical Danum Valley breakfast of chicken nuggets and noodles, we travelled to various examples of different styles of logging. As you can imagine it was oppressively hot and humid - hence we swam in a river to cool off! However, we had to get out as pygmy elephants were coming downstream. As dusk drew in we went to Borneo Lodge, which is where Prince William and Catherine have previously stayed. That evening it rained like I have never seen rain before - definitely in a rain forest! When we got back to Danum Valley myself and seven others went on a night drive to experience the rain forest's nocturnal life. The next day we began the Two-Day Project at Baru Catchment. There were various topic options for the Two Day projects such as: diurnal variations in microclimates, mapping changes in pipe systems, land sliding and soil erosion in logged forests and many more. I chose to assess whether logging has an impact on macroinvertebrate ecosystems in rivers.



On the second day of the Two-Day Project we saw Red Leaf monkeys and a family of gibbons on the way to our Two Day project site. That afternoon we presented to the group our hypotheses, methodology, main findings and predicted analysis.



Our Two-Day Project group, I am on the back left, at the Tambun River.

Our time at Danum Valley came to an end on May 3<sup>rd</sup> and we travelled back to Lahu Datu. It was interesting to see the scenery on the drive as on the way to Danum Valley it was dark. We caught a plane to Kota Kinabalu. It was strange stepping back into air conditioning and not showering with my rainforest friends - cicadas.

The next morning, 4<sup>th</sup> May, we discussed the urbanisation impacts on Kota Kinabalu on our way to local mangroves where we saw the incredible aerial roots. We went to a beach resort for some well-deserved relaxation in the afternoon where we were indulged in exquisite food and wonderful sandy beaches with bath temperature sea!

We presented to our lecturers a presentation on our One Day project findings and methodology. On our final day we were all very reluctant to leave and close the chapter on this incredible trip where we had all created and experienced such wonderful things.

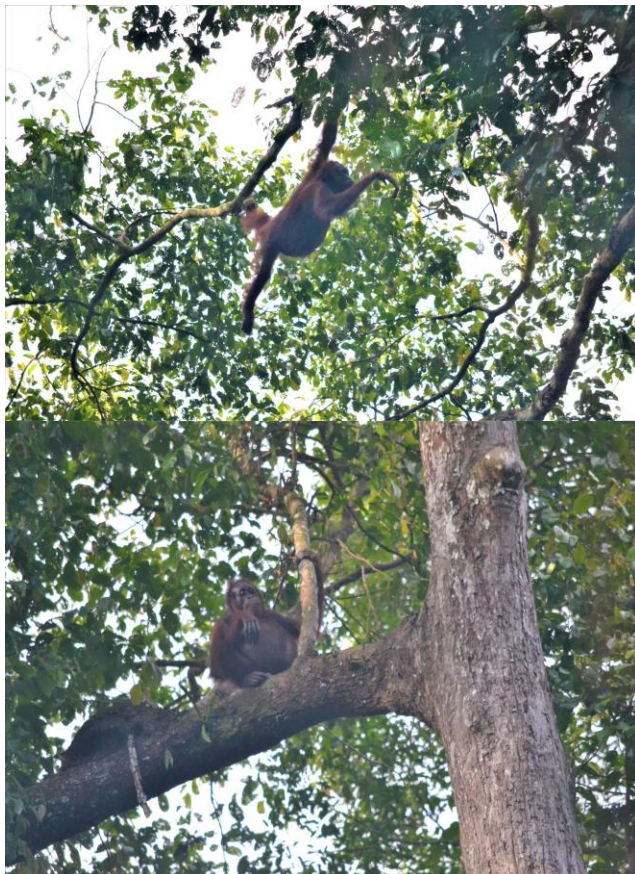
During my two weeks, I got to see first-hand the vast abundance of wildlife in Borneo. I saw a green pit viper, orangutans, Red Leaf Monkeys, moon rat, monitor lizard, python, bearded pig, frog faced owl, pigmy squirrel, Rhinoceros hornbill, banded civet, long tail macaque, giant flying squirrel and many more.

Thank you so much to the Old Rendcombian Society for contributing to my fantastic, once in a lifetime experience - I will never forget it!





Walking across the bridge in Danum Valley over the Segama River.



Orangutan spotted in the tree next to the bridge.



Mass Flowering in a dipterocarp.



Green Pit Viper.



A long tail macaque.