INDONESIA HERPETOFAUNA FOUNDATION

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Introduction

The past few months have been quite slow. Nevertheless, thanks to your support, we have managed to carry on and keep some things going. In the period of April-August 2020, we've saved some snakes, made some educational videos, and published a new book! We also have a special feature at the end of this one, by our wildlife vet, Purbo.

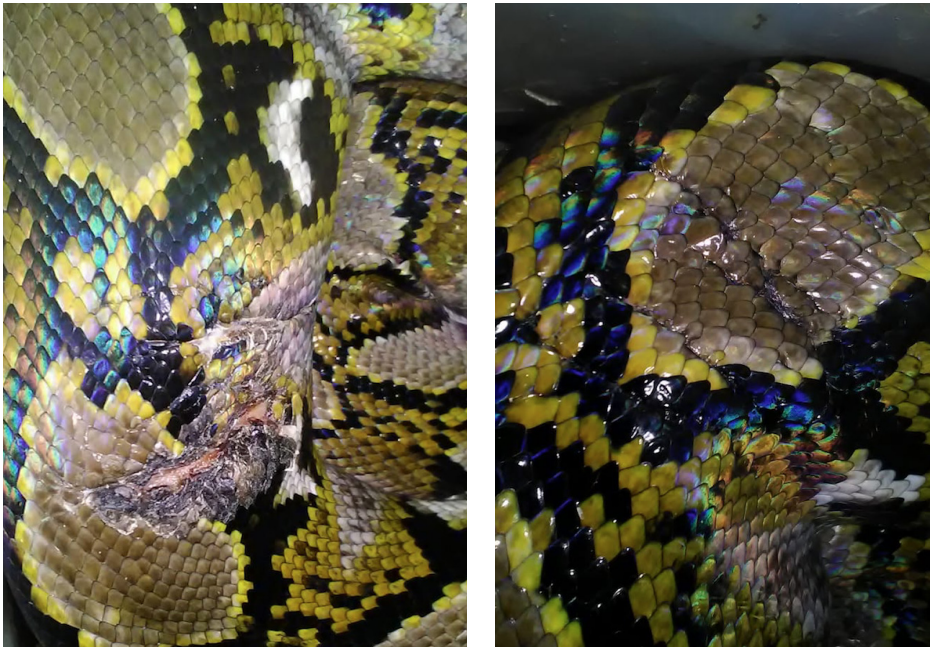
Ciliwung Herpetarium

Rescue and Release

Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic things have been a bit slow for us recently. From April to August 2020, we have successfully rescued and released a total of 24 snakes. These comprised of the following; 13 reticulated pythons, 5 spitting cobras, 5 red-necked keelbacks and 1 puff-faced water snake. Our snake-human conflict mitigation program is supported by Save the Snakes.

(Above)Picking up some snakes from the North Jakarta Fire Service, which have been rescued from conflict by our firefighting colleagues.

(above) Puff-faced water snake rescued from a house in Bogor. It was immediately released into a marsh nearby.
(below) Baby red-necked keelbacks rescued from a primate enclosure at IAR Rescue Centre in Bogor. They were immediately relocated to nearby forest.



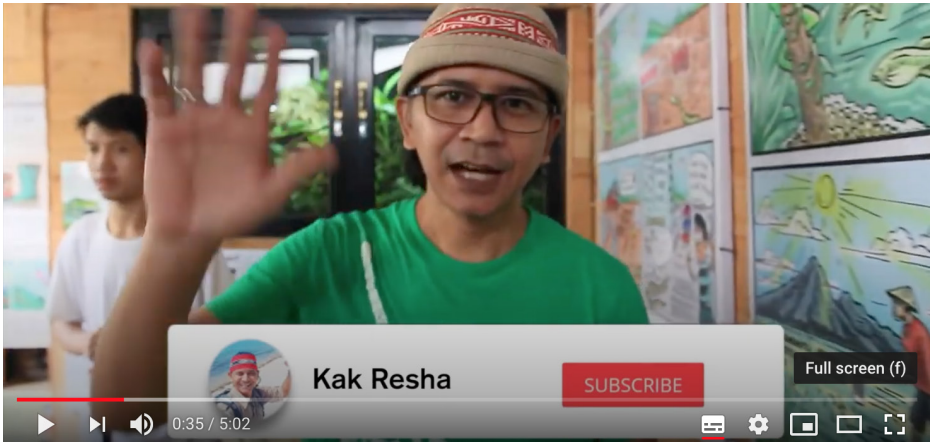
(above) Wounds of a reticulated python from Jakarta before (left) and after treatment by our animal team (right).

Education

We have conducted four online educational talks, including one webinar about snake-bite, organised in collaboration with 4Life Indonesia and Indonesia Toxinology Society.

Media Visit

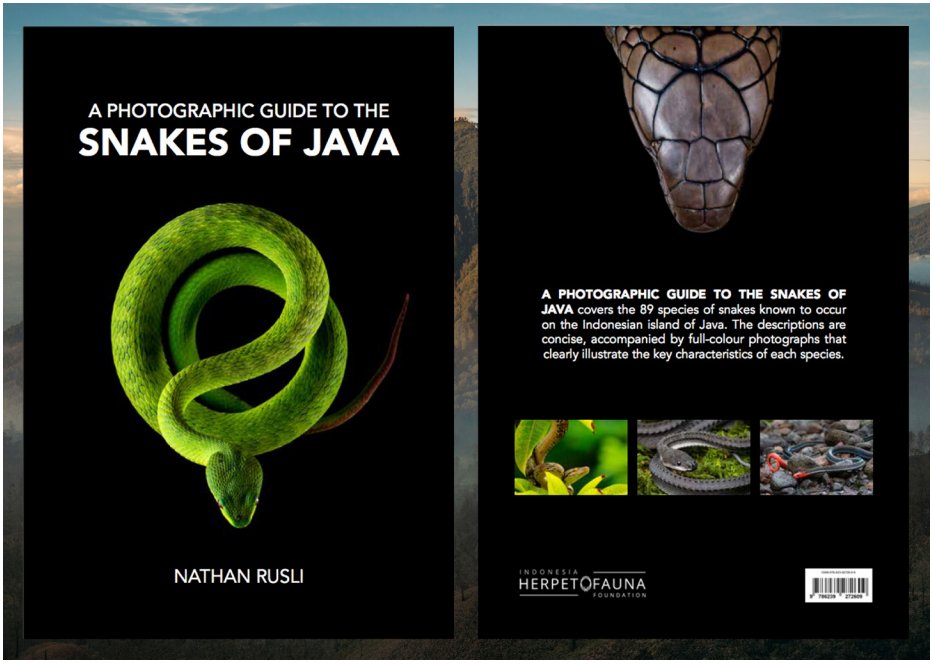
We have had recent exposure from several local news sites, promoting our conservation work. We also helped environmental educator Kak Resha make some videos to educate the general public about snakes.



Publications

A Photographic Guide to the Snakes of Java

A field guide that clearly shows the diagnostic characters of all the 89 species of terrestrial snakes found on Java. It is avaliable worldwide, and details on how to order can be found in the following link:
https://www.facebook.com/snakequest/photos/a.447654885565670/1285466295117854/?__cft__[0]=AZUI8UNhiqGvh3y7dC-kw-Gwfr6ZTbfAABqQO0MpggKYMQT6X12AO6HYatWTrO9FlDCLasGkRdBKX-8Kk-r3-JDP6jYj8trlrWPMUosuKA-3SrhaeB1Hh9LB1pu0J2EaSSR_RfeQqqEmI04B-TWtb1E4wcYFIpIwt-4MEsRhbFNSX8hxw&__tn__=%2CO%2CP-R



Meet the Team

This month we would like to feature Drh. Nur Purba Priambada, a vet that's been helping us help injured wildlife for the past few years. His day job involves working with primates, and much of his time off is also spent with wildlife. This is his story...

Drh. Nur Purba Priambada, Wildlife Veterinarian

When I was a little boy, I remember my father used to have a lot of pets. One of my chores during my childhood was to take care of these animals. I liked animals, but I never envisioned myself doing what I do today.

Initially, I wanted to become a doctor. However, I failed in the university enrollment exam. Instead of getting my first choice, I got my second choice, Veterinary Medicine, because my parents asked me to do so.

My journey began in 2004, when I became a veterinary student at Airlangga University in Surabaya, East Java. During my time there, I thought that domestic animals were too boring, and I quite enjoyed the diversity and challenges of wildlife medicine. I then joined the Wildlife Study Club at the university, which took me on various expeditions to some of the most inhospitable places in the country. I also remembered the wildlife documentaries I often watched, which fascinated me with the natural world.

In 2014, I moved to Bogor, West Java, to start a job at IAR Indonesia, working as a vet at their primate rehabilitation facility. Slow lorises and macaques were the most common species at the centre, the majority of them rescued from the illegal wildlife trade. Several years after I moved to Bogor, I somehow ended up corresponding with a young herpetologist by the name of Nathan Rusli. He ran the Ciliwung Herpetarium, a volunteer-based educational facility in Bogor, which also served as a temporary holding facility for reptiles that were rescued from conflict situations. Occasionally they would have injured animals that needed medical attention, and Nathan asked if I'd be willing to help them out.

I had no experience with reptiles at the time, and I wasn't sure if I'd be able to treat the animals accordingly. In addition to that, most of the snakes that came in were either large, venomous, or both, significantly increasing the risk of working with them. I had my doubts. But I was passionate about wildlife, and reptile medicine was a rare skill to have in Indonesia. I thought this would allow me to learn and get more experience with a different group of animals, so I said yes.

The first few cases were difficult, as I was not familiar with reptiles, to say the least. However, consulting with other vets around the world, reading literature, and combining that with the herpetological knowledge of the team at Ciliwung, we managed to pull things off and give these animals a second chance in life. Slowly but surely, I picked up some skills from my interactions with reptiles at the herpetarium. During my day job, I often remove snakes from the primate enclosures or office buildings, and while doing so, I take the opportunity to educate and familiarise my work colleagues with the snakes around them.

For me, being a wildlife vet is not about money. I've never been paid for treating the animals at the herpetarium, but I think the experiences and knowledge are much more valuable. One particular moment I cherish happened in January this year. I was at work one afternoon, and a WhatsApp message came in. It was Nathan, sending me a picture of a severely injured reticulated python that had been hacked with a machete multiple times. It was still alive, but barely moving. I was very tired and had work again the next day, so I told him "We'll see what happens. I'm not sure I can make it today." I finally arrived home that evening and told my wife about what had happened. My wife, Yumni, was also a vet, but recently stopped practicing in order to take care of our daughter. She said "poor snake, don't you think we ought to do something about it?"

And so a decision was made. We packed all our gear into bags, and got on the scooter as a family, making our way to the herpetarium. Upon our arrival, the team had placed the snake in a sterile box, and prepared an area for us to work. This 3-metre snake had some very deep wounds, the most severe of them near the neck. Together with my wife and the Ciliwung team, we began performing the longest reptile surgery throughout my career. It took about 4 hours, and at midnight we finally managed to stitch together most of the wounds. The snake was placed in a sterile box to recover and be monitored closely over the next few weeks.

That night, we had a post-surgery meal of chicken, cake and durian. We were all sat together, chatting and joking around, celebrating a job well done, along with a colleague's belated birthday. It was all hands on deck for this one, a genuine team effort. We were all exhausted, but satisfied with the result. It is moments like these that keep me going. The feeling of satisfaction, teamwork, and solidarity after undertaking a challenging task is like nothing else I've ever felt. I love my job and I don't think my life would be fulfilled doing anything else.

We would like to thank all partners and supporters who have helped us in efforts to conserve the amphibians and reptiles of Indonesia: