



Jerudong International School (JIS), Brunei, Borneo

# Building for conservation

*Orphaned orangutans needed to improve their climbing skills – could students design a way to get them back to their swinging best?*

Some of the world’s most intelligent and emotional primates, orangutans are more similar to humans than some people would like to think. Yet despite this, humans are the biggest single threat to orangutan existence: their numbers are declining fast due to mass deforestation and poaching.

Students at the Jerudong International School (JIS) in Brunei share the island of Borneo with 10,000 of these great apes. And, aware of the danger faced by the primates, a group of IB

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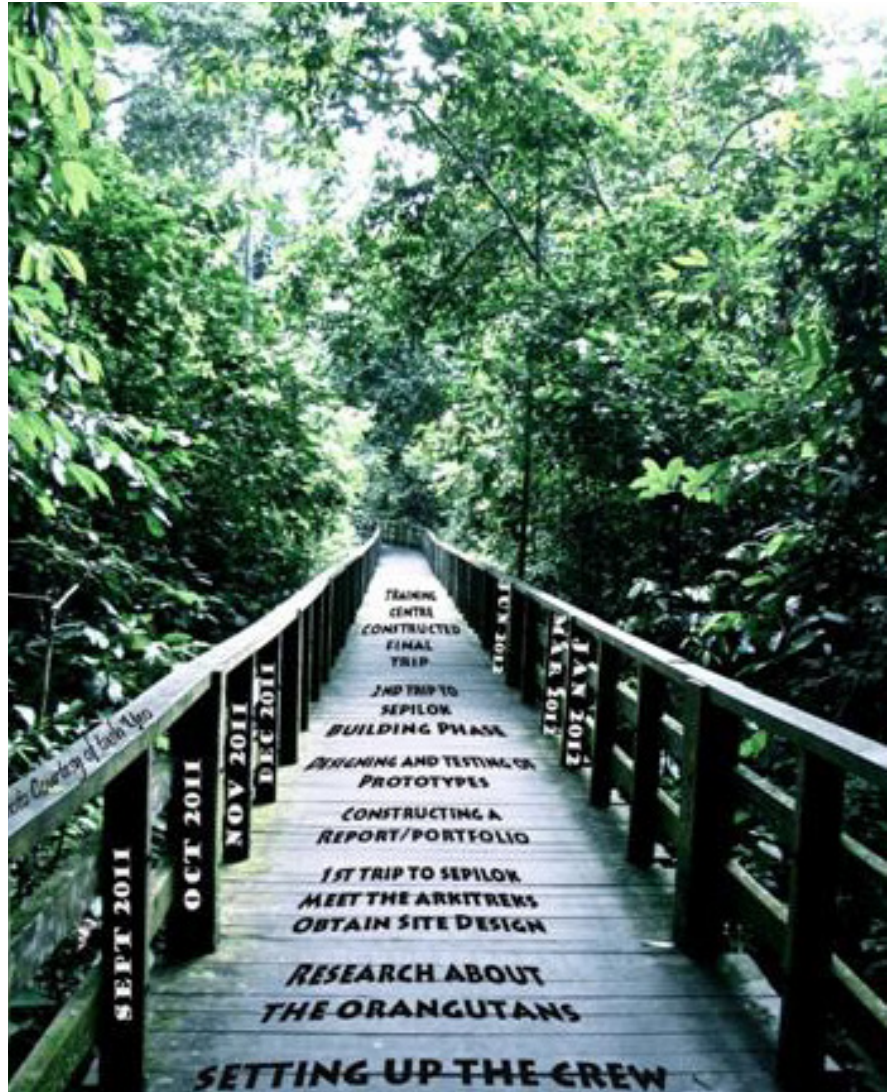
Diploma Programme students have mobilized to aid conservation and awareness.

“Orangutans are hunted by poachers who kill the parents and sell the babies as pets,” explain students Sum Yi Ren and Kevin Sargunaraja.

“Seeing their parents being tortured and killed is so traumatic for the young animals that some die from depression. This endangered species may be completely wiped out in 20 years, so we want to play our part in ensuring this does not happen.”

As every member of the group has ambitions to be an architect or engineer in future, they decided to volunteer to build something for the Sepilok Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre in East Malaysia. The plan: to work in conjunction with a local architecture firm to build an area for young orangutans, somewhere to help them improve their climbing skills and rehabilitate them to live independently in the jungle once again.

The first step for the group was to visit the site to get inspiration for the design. “We measured, recorded and even used trigonometry to work out heights and lengths,” say Sum Yi and Kevin. “Whoever knew mathematics could be so useful?”



The students' approach (main picture) helped Sepilok orangutans get some climbing practice (above)

Back in Brunei, the students worked with the architecture firm on their site designs, building models and drawing plans. A prototype of an artificial tree with a spring base was built and tested to see if it could hold the weight of an orangutan.

To make their ambitions a reality, the students realized they would need funding of B\$15,000. After approaching several organizations, they managed to raise almost B\$6,000 in donations from Baiduri Bank Brunei and a generous parent. An orangutan awareness week at school where students sold ice creams and wristbands raised a further B\$5,000, putting them well on the way to their target.

A second visit to Sepilok earlier this year was spent laying the foundations for the artificial trees and perfecting designs, to be completed this summer. During the trip, the group was lucky enough to interact with the orangutans themselves – with two students even getting to hold a juvenile animal. “It is from these close-up interactions that one can truly appreciate their strength and intelligence,” report the students. “That pushes us even further to help them survive as a species and finish what we have started.”