

THE

west end

magazine

4101 Lifestyle
Journal

Home &
Garden Shops
Professional Health
Socials Dining



Spring 2011

Edition #8

\$4.40



CONSERVATION PROJECT

Passionate about 'doing her bit' to make a difference in the world, Megan Davidson has spent the past 18 months arranging for like-minded volunteers to participate in conservation projects on Malaysia's peninsula and the island of Borneo.

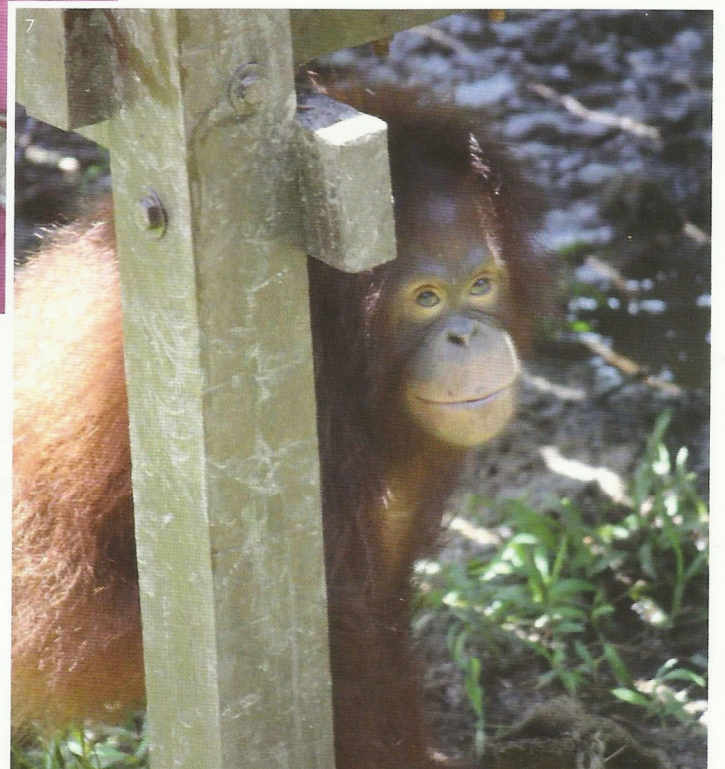
Similar to Australia's koalas, Malaysia's orang-utans are the iconic animals that draw international visitors to Borneo to assist in the rehabilitation of the endangered species and take part in the reforestation of their rainforest habitat. The World Wildlife Fund estimates a 14 per cent decline in global orang-utan populations since the 1950s and conservationists have turned to land rehabilitation as a key means to protect the species.

Like the wildlife corridors established for koalas, the 'corridor of life' along the Lower Kinabatangan River not only benefits the orang-utans but has far reaching effects for other wildlife species, neighbouring communities and the volunteers who return home with renewed vigour for conservation of the world's environment.

"Volunteers on these projects can see the real difference their contribution makes whether they work to claim back palm oil plantations for

the rainforest, share cultural knowledge with the locals of Borneo or directly care for animals," Megan says. "It is fantastic to see participants come home motivated about the environment and inspired by proof that their individual actions can make the world a better place."

It was a meeting with the energetic Fareea Ma, the Malaysian based operations manager of the conservation projects, that convinced Megan that she had a role to play in regenerating environments in Sabah and Sarawak. Enthused by the wisdom and commitment of Fareea's local project team, the West Ender expanded the services of her corporate training company Sentir Vida - Spanish for 'feel life' - to incorporate a booking service for the conservation projects. She funds her conservation work by continuing her corporate training activities. "I like to encourage people to do what they can for the planet; not just talk about it but do something, whether that is



(1) Populations of Orang-utan in Malaysia are under threat from deforestation (2) Volunteers visit to Semenggoh Rehabilitation Centre in Borneo on the Orang-utan experience project in August 2010 (Ben Hug, Claire Adby, Laura Frederick, Francis Robert, Ian Rudderham, Corrine Ann Broadby & Cerys Jeremy) (3) Sally Hawes relaxes after cleaning out animal enclosures (4) Signage marks the reforestation work undertaken along the Lower Kinabatangan River by various agencies (5) Founder of Sentir Vida Megan Davidson (6) Volunteers Sally Hawes and James Kemp from the United Kingdom (7) Orang-utan
Images provided by Sentir Vida

re-using a plastic bag or regenerating a rainforest, we can all do something that makes a difference,” Megan says.

The strength of the volunteer experience comes from Sentir Vida’s links and cooperation with organisations active in the area including the World Wildlife Fund and WOX Malaysia. Signage within the regenerated forest lists the many international groups who over the years have steadily reclaimed patchwork areas of palm oil plantations for the rainforest. Volunteers interact with local communities and actively participate in school activities, which facilitate the cultural exchange and increase the awareness of sustainable living.

To date, Megan has assisted about 50 volunteers from Australia and the United States to participate in conservation projects in Malaysia, which range in duration from four to 28 days. Megan says volunteering with Sentir Vida only requires the fitness levels needed for a couple of days gardening.

Volunteers can choose from projects such as working alongside Kuala Lumpur zoo keepers to enrich the lives of captive animals, visiting a rehabilitation centre to assist in the repatriation of injured and orphaned orang-utans or replanting a tract of forest with other volunteers.

Conservation projects cater for individuals and family groups and start from \$600 per person and include accommodation, project activities, airport transfers and most food. More information can be found at www.sentirvida.com.

BY MARIA CERESA