



Central Kalimantan Orangutan Reintroduction Program of the Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation at Nyaru Menteng

Aox's Story, May 2011



Aox is a 5-year-old male orangutan at the Central Kalimantan Orangutan Reintroduction Program of the Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation, at Nyaru Menteng. He is part of the Forest School group, who spend all day in the forest practicing climbing, swinging and foraging for fruit; they only come back to the centre in the evenings to sleep.

One afternoon at the end of March, he was rushed into the clinic with blood all over his hands: it seemed he had been in some kind of fight. It is not unusual for forest school students to encounter wild monkeys in their forest playground, and in many ways, learning which animals you can interact with is part of their training for their future life in the forest. But this time Aox had evidently taken on someone much stronger than him, and two of his fingers had been badly bitten.

It was clear to the medical team that Aox would need surgery to partially amputate both these fingers. They quickly started him on high-level pain relief and antibiotics, stabilised his condition and ran pre-surgical blood tests whilst preparing for the operation.

The surgery took two and a half hours, with two vets operating and another two medics monitoring Aox while he was under anaesthetic. It was a difficult choice between amputating more of the finger, so that the skin could be closed neatly over the top; or preserving as much of the finger as possible, but leaving a deficit in the skin, which would have to heal by itself. Primates are very capable of undoing stitches and re-opening wounds, which would be a disaster for Aox's hands. But they can also make full use of any remaining part of an amputated finger to climb and grip branches and manipulate food. The medical team decided to preserve as much of the two fingers as possible, and to manage the wounds afterwards.



Aox's wounds were dressed and bandaged every day while they were healing. It was very important to use the right kind of dressings on the wounds so they would heal as quickly as possible, and to use the right bandages so that they would be properly protected. Aox had to stay inside the sick-bay so the bandages wouldn't get dirty or wet, as it might soak through and contaminate the wound. He would often look out of the sick-bay window at the other orangutans playing outside, but he was very tolerant and didn't try to take off the bandages too often!

Four weeks after his accident, Aox's fingers had healed enough that he did not need dressings any more. For the first few days he still held his fingers apart, as though he was still wearing the bandages! But gradually he started to use his hands as normal.

This little boy has been through such a lot, and we are all very proud of him for being so patient while his hands were healing. It was an exciting day for all involved when he was given the all-clear by the medical team and returned to Forest School, where he is now climbing trees just as well as his classmates, despite his missing fingers! We hope he has learned not to be so bold with the other wildlife in the forest from now on.

Aox's escapade has somewhat depleted the stock of donated dressings and bandages in the Nyaru Menteng clinic. If you are interested in making a donation to help us continue to provide the highest level of care for the orangutans at the centre, please contact us via the website at www.orangutan.or.id

