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Indonesian Police Finally Act in Alleged Orangutan Torture, Killing Cases

Indonesian police have questioned a researcher who uncovered the alleged torture and killing of orangutans in a palm oil plantation area in East Kalimantan.

Yaya Rayadin, a researcher from state-owned Mulawarman University in Samarinda, told the Jakarta Globe on Wednesday that the questioning took place at Kutai Kartanegara Police headquarters on Monday.

"They asked me about the bones of an orangutan that were taken to my lab for analysis," Yaya said, adding that the remains were found by locals at a plantation area in Puan Cepak, Muara Kaman district.

"I told them that based on forensic examinations, the bones belonged to an adult orangutan and that it died from unnatural causes. The bones showed marks of sharp weapons," he said, adding that he had handed remains to the Natural Resources Conservation Agency (BKSDA) for evidence purposes.

It was the first time police have questioned anyone in relation to the alleged killing of the protected animals.

The shocking allegations were first made public in September, though police at the time said they needed more proof before an investigation could be launched.

"We need evidence. Can anyone show us the location of the killing, who did it?" Kutai Kartanegara Police Chief Adj. Sr. Comr. I Gusti Harryarsama told RCTI recently. "If there are graves, we can exhume the bodies and take photos."

The TV station has aired chilling images of people torturing and killing the primates, including the plate number of a motorcycle that was used by one of the alleged killers.

The practice of killing orangutans had taken place since 2008, Yaya said.

"The forests are the natural habit of orangutans, including the forests that were later converted into palm-oil plantation," he said.

"However, they adapt to changes very well and they survive by observing and learning from the environment around them. The only food available is palm so they eat it," Yaya said.

One orangutan could eat up to 30 to 40 palm trees a day, he said.

"Therefore, plantation firms consider them as pests that must be controlled to prevent losses."

Meanwhile, RCTI interviewed a former plantation employee who claimed that plantation firms offered rewards for anyone who could capture orangutans dead or alive.

“The order was to capture orangutans and monkeys, bring them to the office. If we brought three, we’ll get Rp 3 million (\$333),” the anonymous source said.

The captured orangutans would be caged, beaten and buried.