



**The Leuser Nature School
Bukit Mas, Sumatra**



The Leuser Nature School has been built at Bukit Mas with the aim of incentivising local farmers to become guardians of the forest by providing free education for their children in exchange for their active involvement in forest restoration and protection efforts.

There are no other secondary schools in the area, making it extremely expensive and challenging for families to send their children to school. The Leuser Nature School is therefore enabling local children in the villages around Bukit Mas to remain in education for much longer than they might otherwise have done – before the Leuser Nature School was built, they would have finished their schooling at age 11 or 12.

A typical school day starts at 7am, enabling the pupils to start their lessons before the heat of the day becomes too intense. Dressed in the uniforms provided by the school, the pupils start their day with half an hour of dance to contemporary Indonesian pop anthems - to help them feel happy and alert before they sit down for lessons!

“The Leuser Ecosystem is the last place on Earth where orangutans, rhinos, elephants and tigers still live together in the wild. Projects like the Leuser Nature School, which involve local people, give us the best chance of safeguarding Leuser’s forests and wildlife in the long term.”

- Panut Hadisiswoyo



A lesson in full swing

One of the school's aims is to train the next generation in sustainable agriculture, so the school building is flanked by a small but thriving vegetable garden. The pupils are taught how to grow everything from small chilli plants to tall rows of corn, all without chemical fertilisers or pesticides.



Empty plastic bottles are upcycled into seed trays for the school garden

Inside the classroom, there is a steadily growing library of books in Bahasa Indonesia and English. Many of the English books have been donated by SOS donors and volunteers, and there is a strong focus on wildlife and the environment.



A delivery of new English language books

In addition to their usual lessons, the school often provides extra learning experiences led by local experts. Recently, for example, the pupils were taught to make handicrafts using palm leaves and other natural, sustainable materials. This session, led by a local woman whose child attends the school, aimed to introduce the pupils to the idea of ethical entrepreneurship.



Handicraft lessons result in lovely hand-made products

An event in March 2019 brought together local dignitaries, members of the wildlife and forestry authorities, a media crew and Orangutan Information Centre staff to celebrate the school children's achievements so far. Panut Hadisiswoyo gave a speech to welcome everyone, and to explain why the school was built as part of our dedication to the future of conservation in Sumatra. The children then performed traditional dances, poetry in English and local songs in both English and Bahasa Indonesia.



Some of the boys perform a traditional dance



Traditional dance by the girls



The bamboo school building in progress



The beautiful finished school

“Visiting the Lucy Wisdom School was one of the best experiences I’ve ever had in Sumatra. For me, it epitomises the feeling of hope we all have for the future of Sumatra’s wildlife – not only are the school’s pupils having an amazing experiential education now, but we are investing in the conservationists of the future”

- Lucy Radford, SOS



