QUARTERLY

NEWSLETTER 3 - 2026

July - September

We design agroecosystems and share knowledge to build a sustainable future together.



ecotica



Late afternoon on the Barito River, Murung Raya Regency, Central Kalimantan. Haze settles over the landscape, reducing visibility across the river. | 29 August 2026

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Exploring Resilience in Remote Indonesia

Q3 2026 was defined by exploration and deep immersion in remote Indonesian communities. Our team travelled by train and ship to areas facing significant challenges—from haze-covered Borneo landscapes to villages struggling with electricity shortages and drought conditions. Our journey allowed us to witness how modern lifestyles blend with traditions. We shared our ideas of resilient systems with locals and enjoyed the remarkable hospitality of the locals.

Kokki Bitja: Food as a Starting Point for Climate Conversations

Every meal begins long before it reaches the kitchen.

On 18 July, Ecotica joined an event at Barricade, a bookshop/café in Yogyakarta. It's a space for reading and discussions. That morning was about Kokki Bitja, a cookbook with recipes from the past. Fifteen participants came together to explore food, culture and our relationship with what we eat. Later the conversation continued over lunch featuring local food.

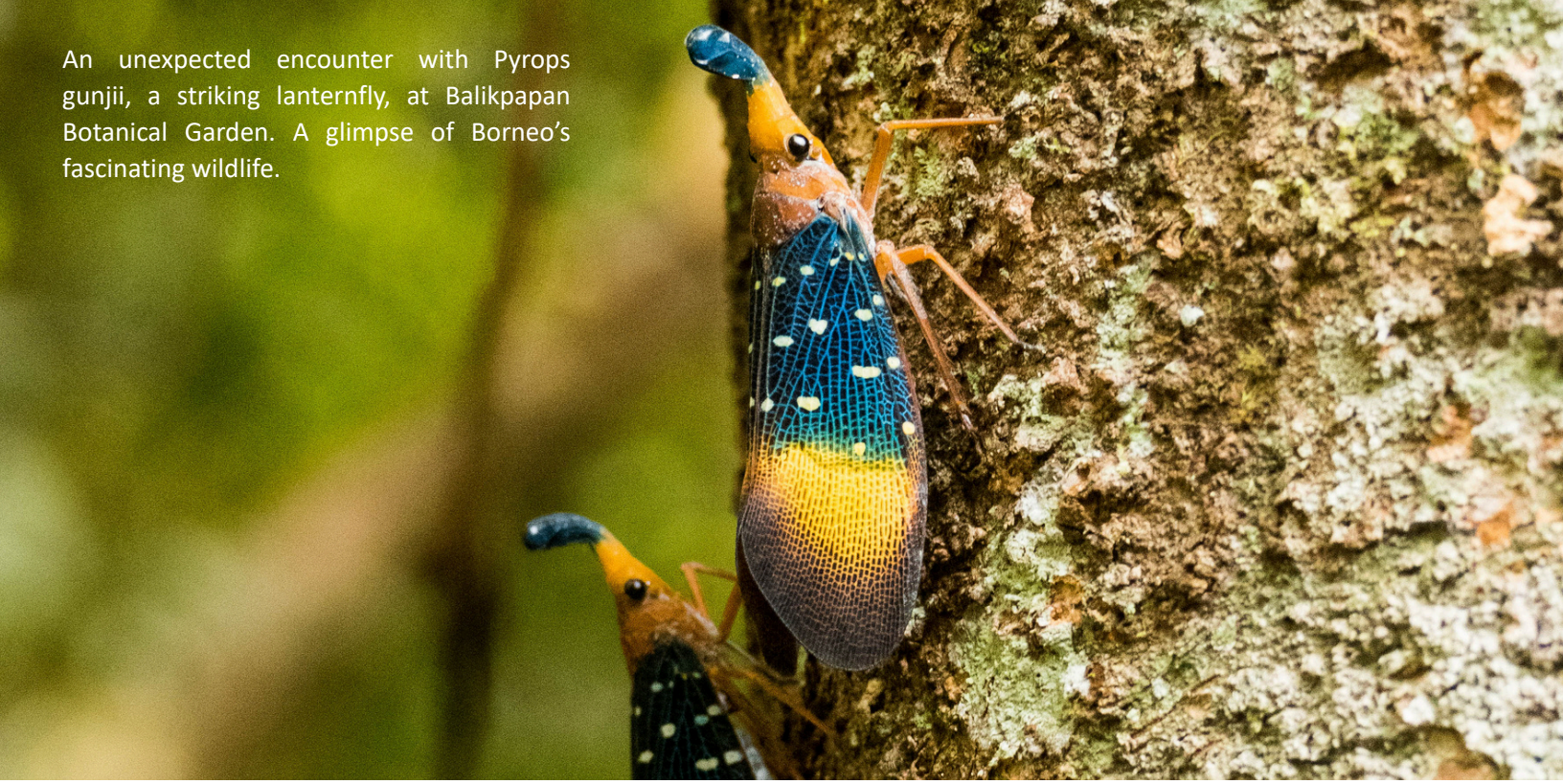
The discussion invited us to look beyond what is on our plates: to the soil that grows our food, the farmers who care for it, the biodiversity that supports it, and the knowledge and culture carried through generations.

Food can be a powerful doorway into conversations about climate change and the future of our food systems. Preserving a certain food culture also requires the land, ecosystems and communities that made it possible in the past.

What started with a book discussion has led to a new collaboration. We are now planning future Climate Café sessions at Barricade, exploring different formats for creating welcoming and meaningful conversations around climate change related issues.

A gathering of shared stories, meaningful conversations, and local flavours at the Kokki Bitja discussion.





An unexpected encounter with Pyrops gunjii, a striking lanternfly, at Balikpapan Botanical Garden. A glimpse of Borneo's fascinating wildlife.

WHAT WE LEARNED IN KALIMANTAN, THE INDONESIAN SIDE OF BORNEO

The effects of the drought were impossible to ignore for anyone visiting the island. With an extreme dry season caused by climate change and fueled by El Niño, the Barito River — a major river in Borneo — was extremely low. Yet the river remains central to everyday life. People use it for transportation, washing, bathing and other daily needs.

In one village we visited, there was no conventional electricity system. A small solar panel provided basic lighting, but the electricity available to each house was not enough to run a refrigerator. Across many of the villages we visited, mobile phone reception was unavailable or very limited. In some areas, Starlink – internet access by satellite - was the only way to connect to the outside world.

Communities in Borneo face challenges. In Balikpapan, home to Indonesia's largest oil refinery, we saw another striking contradiction: residents form long queues for petrol at the pump. Truck drivers are the most impacted, waiting overnight for a refuel. Further into Central Kalimantan, fuel access dwindles and impacts the cost of necessities. Food is therefore more expensive. Access is another challenge; locals sometimes rely on hauling roads – built by private companies for heavy transporters – to travel home.

We witnessed with our own eyes extensive palm oil plantations, deforestation, gold mining activity, and significant logging transport. Once, following directions to our destination in Central Kalimantan, we had to traverse a gold mine. The site was so big that we got lost a few times crossing the mine.

We were no longer observing these environmental issues from a distance; we were standing directly within them.

Yet, Kalimantan also kept reminding us of what is worth protecting. Along the way, we discovered unfamiliar local fruits, encountered snakes and spotted insects such as lanternflies. Being there during the dry season meant insect activity was naturally lower, but even these small encounters offered glimpses of the biodiversity that remains around us.

Kalimantan is home to extraordinary forests, wildlife and ecosystems that support not only the species that live there, but also the lives and livelihoods of people. Yet during our time there, smoke from ongoing wildfires repeatedly obscured the landscape. We had imagined seeing the beautiful forests of Borneo; instead, much of what we saw was filtered through thick haze.

The fires and haze are still affecting large parts of the region today, impacting health and daily lives of the locals. Respiratory problems and closed schools are common.

Rubbish could also be found in the most remote natural places we visited. It highlighted the urgent need for a proper waste management system.

Yet alongside these difficult realities, we experienced something deeply encouraging. Kind people generously welcomed us into their lives. Our understanding of the region was enriched by the people who opened their homes and shared their stories with us.



Beautifully textured and intensely sour, buah rotan is the fruit of a rattan palm found in Kalimantan's forests. Its scaly skin hides pale, juicy flesh with a sharp, mouth-puckering taste.

THE PEOPLE WHO WELCOMED US

Our time in Kalimantan was also shaped by the people who welcomed us. In East Kalimantan, Mbak Santi and Mas Loren and their family, and in Central Kalimantan, Bapak Terigan, Head of Karali Village, and his family, opened their homes to us and introduced us to people in their communities.

We also met many local community members who were generous with their time and willing to share their experiences and perspectives. These conversations helped us understand the places we visited on a deeper level, generating insights we could not find anywhere else for our survey.





ASSESSING OUR FUTURE PROJECT VIABILITY



We went to Borneo looking for places where Ecotica might set up camp. Despite identifying promising sites, we also measured the feasibility of a project with the specific challenges. Access is difficult, logistics are costly, and essentials need to be imported from Java. The remoteness of such locations means that most people who would like to visit a model farm to learn sustainable designs would never do.



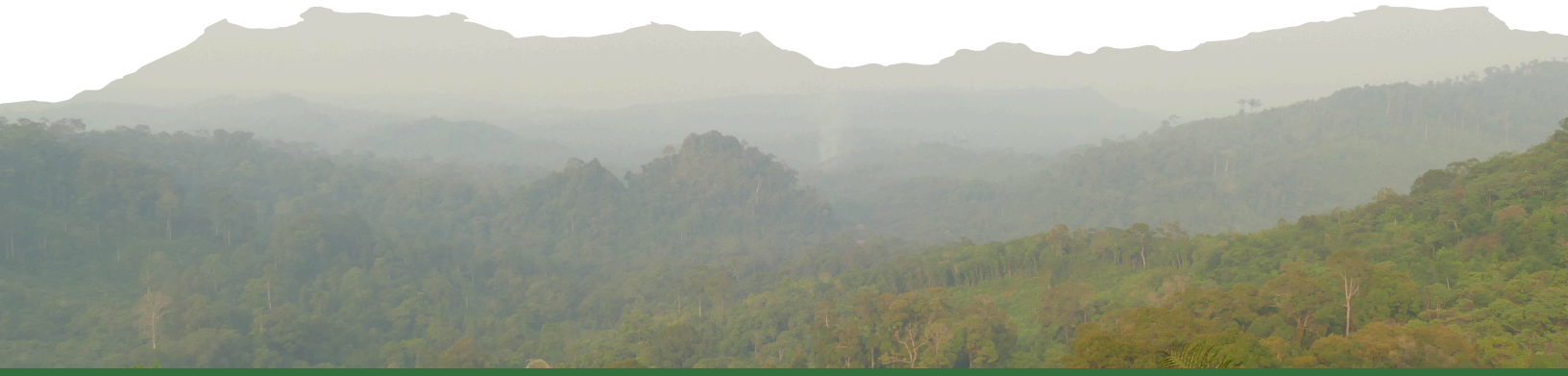
A river that becomes a beach. In Muara Teweh, Central Kalimantan, the Barito River reveals a sandy stretch at its lowest level, where people gather, play, and even walk across to the other side. But across Kalimantan, changing rainfall patterns and prolonged drought are reminders of how climate change can affect rivers, ecosystems, and the communities that depend on them.

UNEXPECTED POTENTIAL IN EAST JAVA

After several weeks in Kalimantan, we returned to Java and made what was meant to be a short visit to Malang, East Java. There, an unexpected reunion opened a door we had not anticipated. We met an extended family member whom we had not seen for more than a decade. He runs a side business renting land for timber cultivation and introduced us to the network of people he has been working with.

That connection to a new network opens new doors. This network has been receiving numerous offers from landowners looking to rent or sell their land, while they themselves are currently renting 60 hectares to grow Balsa, a fast-growing tree used in woodwork. This was the starting point for a new exploration, to see if the area near Malang offers suitable locations for Ecotica's future work.

We spent almost three weeks near Malang actively surveying potential sites together. We did our best to explore the available options, understand the land and access with people who know the area well. This might lead to land access for a project in Java, which is usually prohibitively expensive being one of the most densely populated places in the world. Our search for a potential location continues.





WHAT'S NEXT

Our next step is to keep exploring and developing programs. We will continue working from Yogyakarta, maintain our networks in Borneo and Java. Alongside this, we will continue developing programmes that allow us to contribute to regenerative agriculture, climate awareness and environmental stewardship through community outreach, which takes the form of talks, university work groups, consultancy.

If you are interested in collaborating, supporting, or exchanging ideas, we would love to connect.
Reach us at www.ecotica.org.

Best regards,
Team Ecotica

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A glimpse of Kalimantan's natural wonders: the intriguing pitcher plant (Nepenthes), the local matakucing fruit, and a tiny frog perched on a rock along the riverbank.