

Project Update June 2025

Rufford I.D.: 43116-1

Project Title: Ecological Investigation of Soil Microbiome in *Rafflesia Zollingeriana* Habitat: a Basis for Conservation and Preservation Action

Update: In October last year, we collected field samples (photos attached) and then moved into the laboratory phase for analysis.

In April 2025, we returned to the study site—not for data collection this time, but to conduct an educational campaign. I invited a colleague from Komunitas Peduli Puspa Langka Bengkulu to join and deliver a session on *Rafflesia* conservation in Bengkulu, Sumatra. In addition to local community members living near the area, we also invited relevant stakeholders, including Perhutani (who has legal authority to manage the forest) and the BKSDA from the Ministry of Forestry, which holds legal authority over protected flora and fauna.

We prepared and distributed flyers to promote the event, and to my surprise, agriculture students from Universitas 17 Agustus Banyuwangi, who are part of a student nature lovers group, attended the campaign. Several local artists from Banyuwangi also came. I delivered a presentation on *Rafflesia* biology, its threats, and what actions we can take to protect this rare species.

Many of the participants were unaware of the biological nature of *Rafflesia*, often mistaking it for a flower of the *Tetrastigma* vine. They were fascinated to learn that *Rafflesia* is, in fact, a holoparasite with a unique life cycle.

We also organised a field visit to observe both *Rafflesia* and its host plant in their natural habitat, and we were lucky enough to witness three flowers in full bloom! One of the most touching moments was seeing a 70-year-old local artist make the physically demanding journey to the *Rafflesia* site. He was truly excited and determined to see for himself that this rare flower does indeed grow in Banyuwangi's forests. During the field trip, we also showed the Perhutani that there are more than 30 populations of *Rafflesia zollingeriana* and their host that need to be protected within their area. I also prepared a pre- and post-campaign questionnaire to assess the effectiveness of our educational efforts among participants.

We also published an animated video about *Rafflesia*, which you can view here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A0u1CMAO50A&t=8s>

At the moment, I'm compiling data from the lab, field, questionnaires, and financial reports. I hope to finalize everything and send you the completed report by July.