
Preface

Serendipity plays a large part in science and was also crucial in how we started our drone work. Both of us had been working in Southeast Asia's forests to study its rich biodiversity for many years when we first met in May 2011, over a coffee in the aptly named Greencafe of the Swiss Federal Institute for Science in Zurich. We planned to discuss the ongoing impact of oil palm plantation development on the species we studied and particularly the orangutans. Soon enough we were discussing how costly and time intensive it is to obtain data at regular intervals for species such as orangutans over large areas and how wonderful it would be if we could monitor the nests that orangutans build from the air. Lian Pin had just started to fly remote control fixed wing aircraft so we decided to see if we could fit a camera under a fixed wing, and fit an open source flight controller to it as well so that we could fly pre-programmed missions. A few months later, after some tests in Switzerland, we found ourselves in Sumatra flying a Bixler fixed wing with an APM 1 and camera over the forests.

In a few days we flew 36 missions and collected a wealth of data that made us very enthusiastic about this technology. We shared our ideas and findings with colleagues and because of their positive feedback started the conservationdrones.org website and coined the term conservation drones. Since then we have had the opportunity to work in a large number of locations around the world and posted these on our website in the hope that this would inspire others to explore the use of drones for their work. We hope that we have stimulated a few people to start using drones through the website and our presentations and papers. The last seven years have seen an enormous growth in the use of drones for conservation work and a large amount of exciting work has been done by researchers around the world. With this book we aim to share some of our own work, but fortunately much more the work of others, in the field of drones, conservation, and ecological research. We hope that this will further contribute to excite people about the opportunities that this field offers for conservation.