

THE ORANGUTANS

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ENDANGERED ORANGUTAN

For thousands of years the rainforest home of the orangutan stretched all across Southeast Asia. From a distance the tops of the trees looked like smooth fields of grass. Today due to the actions of man, the orangutan is found only on the Indonesian islands of Borneo and Sumatra.

In the last 50 years the habitat of the orangutan has shrunk 80 percent. Modern man has invaded their forest home with human settlements, logging, and mining. He has burned the forest to clear it for farming and plantations. This combined with the devastating fires that burned in 1997 and 1998 on Borneo and Sumatra, wrecking havoc on the rain forest and its inhabitants. The United Nations described these fires as "**one of the worst environmental disasters of the century**". Over 6000 miles of precious rainforest were destroyed. These fires and drought caused an already threatened orangutan population to come precariously close to extinction. It is estimated that during this time the orangutan population was reduced as much as 30% to an estimated 15,000 animals.

In the aftermath of the forest fires, the orangutan-traumatized, confused, hungry and often injured-became easy prey for hunters. As the mother orangutans ran from the fires to search for scarce food near the villages, they were often killed with machetes or shot and their babies taken to be sold as pets in the black market. The orangutan is near extinction. It will happen in our lifetimes if we do not act now. If we all work together, we can save the orangutan.

There are teams of people working in the forest to help these creatures. Some teams rescue sick, injured or orphaned orangutans. These are taken to reintroduction centers where they are given medical treatment, and care until they are well and old enough to be reintroduced into the forest. This can be a long, costly training process. The teams work around the clock on shoestring budgets.

At the same time another team of scientists and researchers are working to protect the wild orangutans and their habitat. They need to hire guards or rangers to patrol and protect the animals and the forest from the encroachment of human settlements and logging.

The orangutan is near extinction. It will happen in our lifetimes if we do not act quickly. Man has brought orangutans to this fate; only man can help them survive.

Facts About Orangutans What's so special about an orangutan?

Their eyes hold a story that is indecipherable and yet, intuitively we relate to them. Just one look into those eyes and you are hooked.

Orangutans are highly intelligent with an ability to reason and think. This large, gentle red ape is our forgotten relative. We share 97% of the same DNA. Indigenous peoples of Indonesia and Malaysia call this ape Orang Hutan literally translating into English as People of the Forest. In times past they would not kill them because they felt the orangutan was simply a person hiding in the trees, trying to avoid having to go to work or become a slave.

There are four great ape species: gorillas, chimpanzees, bonobos and orangutans. Only the orangutan comes from Asia; the others all come from Africa. The orangutan is the only strictly arboreal ape and the largest tree living mammal in the world. The rest of the apes climb and build sleeping nests in the trees, but are primarily terrestrial (spending their lives on the ground.) Even the hair color of the orangutan, a bright reddish brown, is unique in the ape world.

The orangutan has the most remarkable ability to swing through the forest treetops. They make their home in these trees and build nests each night out of leaves and branches in the very tops of the trees. This is where they live and sleep - sometimes as much as 100 feet above the ground. The orangutan has little need to come down from the trees, as they are uniquely adapted for their arboreal lifestyle.

Almost all of the food they eat grows in the treetops and the frequent rains fill the leaves thus supplying their drinking water. When water is difficult to get, they chew leaves to make a sponge to soak up the water. When it rains very hard the orangutan makes an umbrella for himself out of the big leaves of diptocarp trees. Many people are familiar with the studies that have shown chimpanzees using tools, such as termite-fishing sticks. Recent studies show that orangutans also sometimes fashion tools to aid in the difficult task of foraging for food. Orangutans have four hands instead of two hands and two feet. This makes them graceful and swift while swinging through the trees but it makes walking on the ground very slow and awkward. That is why the orangutan is at a great disadvantage on the ground. This hand configuration is also why the orangutan rarely comes down from the treetops. Their food is there, their home is there and they are safer there. They only come down if there is a need to find food and drink elsewhere as in a drought or fire.

The orangutan has the longest childhood dependence on the mother of any other animal. The babies nurse until they are six. The young males may stay close by their mothers for a few more years but the females may stay until they are well into their teens, allowing them to observe mothering skills as they watch their younger sibling being raised by the mother. There is so much for an orangutan to learn.

Food is often scarce in the rain forest and that is why the orangutan is a semi-solitary creature, living with just the mother and baby and maybe one sibling most of the time. They must spread out through the forest in order to secure enough food. In times of great abundance of food, some orangutans use the opportunity to socialize and may gather in small groups.

Their diet is made up of fruit, bark, leaves, and a variety of insects. The mothers teach the babies what food to eat, where to find that food, in which trees and during which seasons. It is thought that the orangutan must have a very detailed map of the forest in his mind. (This prevents wasting valuable energy travelling to a fruiting tree whose fruits will not ripen for some time, and searching for fruit trees randomly.) The babies must know about 380 varieties of fruit and how to open them; some are very difficult to open because they are protected by sharp spines and shells. Then the baby must learn how to find and catch insects.

When the babies are born the mother is one of the most tender mothers in the animal kingdom, holding and caressing her baby. The baby must be very strong, however, because he must hold on tight to his mother's hair as she swings through the trees. The mother cannot hold on to him as she needs all four feet (or hands) to swing through the trees.

The male orangutan gives a very notable and recognizable call that echoes through the forest. This is called the Long Call and is used to locate and advertise their presence to females or warn other males away.

The males generally remain solitary until they encounter a female who is receptive to mating. They will stay with the female for several days to ensure a successful mating but will soon resume their solitary life.

A fully mature male will have grown very pronounced cheek pads, long hair and a throat sac that is used to make the Long Call. This is a signal that he is sexually mature. The males sometimes weigh well over 200 pounds and have very long hair. A female by comparison is 1/3 to 1/2 his size.

Orangutans may live 35 – 40 years in the wild. They are 8 times as strong as the average human male. A female will only have a baby about every 8 years resulting in only 4 to 5 babies in her lifetime. Hence the pronounced effect on orangutan populations when mothers are lost to poaching or natural disasters.

Summary: Article talks about orangutans and what are the most amazing things about them. They are the largest tree living mammals in the world and the only apes from Asia. Orangutans are clever - they share 97% of the same DNA as we. It is also warning us about extinction, into which human pushes the animals and the extinction is very near. If we read something to get new information and know more, we could better understand what is going on Earth.

smooth [smu:d] (adj) = even : gladek, raven
 logging [lo'gin] (n) = work with wood : drvarsko delo
 mining [mainin] (n) = work in mines : rudarstvo
 invade [inveid] (v) = to capture : vdreti, zavzeti
 wrecking [rekin] (n) = destruction : uničenje
 havoc [hae'v*k] (n) = devastation : pustošenje
 scarce [ske's] (adj) = rare : redek
 orphaned [o':f*nd] (adv) = to lose everyone, stay alone : osirotel
 indecipherable [indisaif*r*bl] (adj) = insoluble : nerazrešljiv
 intuitive [intjuitiv] (adj) : spoznaven
 arboreal [a:bo':ri*1] (adj) = of a tree : ki živi ali raste na drevesu
 spread out [spred aut] (v) = to disseminate : raznesti
 abundance [*ba'nd*ns] (n) = plenty : obilje
 bark [ba:k] (n) = inner bark of a tree : skorja, lubje
 shell [šel] (n) = peel : lupina
 swing [swin] (n) = waving : vihtenje
 echo [ekou] (n) = repetition : odmev
 advertise [ae'dv*taiz] (v) = to warn : naznaniti, opozoriti
 receptive [riseptiv] (adj) = susceptible : sprejemljiv, dovzeten
 mating [meitin] (n) = pairing : parjenje