

Resilient Orangutans Adapt in an Ever-Dwindling Forest *Take Actions on International Orangutan Day to Prevent Further Habitat Loss*

SEATTLE—Orangutan, also called orang-utan, comes from two Malay words, "orang," meaning person and "hutan," meaning forest. For **International Orangutan Day**, Woodland Park Zoo is highlighting the "people of the forest," the challenges they've overcome and how we all can help save this endangered species.



Orangutans face several threats that are rapidly destroying the forest environments they require for survival, including human overpopulation, logging and agriculture. One of the most significant threats is the conversion of forests to unsustainable monocultures, such as palm oil plantations.

The HUTAN-Kinabatangan Orangutan Conservation Programme is a long-time Woodland Park Zoo partner dedicated to conserving Borneo's threatened habitats and wildlife species. For the past few years, HUTAN's researchers have reported that more and more orangutans are venturing into palm oil plantations. This past June, researchers visited a tiny 10-acre patch of forest surrounded by palms. The team discovered more than 30 orangutan nests there and found that nearly all adult palm trees in the area showed signs of orangutans using them for nesting or feeding.

This resourcefulness among orangutans facing a dwindling habitat appears to be a growing trend. "Orangutans, being great apes, are extremely intelligent," said Marc Ancrenaz, the Scientific Director for HUTAN. "Our research in Borneo shows that the species is more flexible and resilient than what we have believed in the past. As such, they can survive in mosaic agricultural landscapes dominated by oil palm plantations and other commodities."

In June, HUTAN researchers conducted three helicopter flights, finding multiple cases of the endangered species nesting in small "forest islands" surrounded by palm oil fields in Lower Kinabatangan. Some nests were even constructed on top of palm trees, with three orangutans seen pulling out shoots from the treetops.

Ancrenaz says as orangutans' natural habitat becomes increasingly tiny and fragmented, promoting coexistence between people and orangutans is critical. "Orangutans are not aggressive, and damages inflicted to people's crops are relatively minor. If people accept to coexist with them and stop killing them, they may recover from recent population declines," said Ancrenaz. HUTAN also works to reforest areas to create corridors and reconnect habitat fragments.

As consumers of manufactured goods and food, we all bear responsibility for the deforestation happening worldwide. However, Ancrenaz says we can also turn things around. "Through our daily choices, we can also be part of the solution. For example, purchasing Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil products and other products produced sustainably can really go a long way to change the extinction tide."

Discover the zoo's four orangutans in the Trail of Vines habitat: siblings Belawan and Heran and mates Godek and Batu. The Orangutan Species Survival Plan identified Batu as a breeding mate for Godek in the future. Species Survival Plans are conservation breeding programs across accredited zoos to help ensure healthy, self-sustaining populations of threatened and endangered species.

There are three species of orangutans found exclusively in Southeast Asia. They include the Bornean orangutan native to the island of Borneo, and Sumatran and Tapanuli orangutans native to the island of Sumatra. The mammals are a critically endangered species, belonging to the family Hominidae, which includes all four great apes: gorillas, chimpanzees, bonobos and orangutans.

How you can protect orangutans and stop deforestation:

- *Look for certified, sustainable palm oil.* Palm oil is common in many candies, foods and household products. The orangutans' habitat has been decimated by the creation of unsustainable oil palm plantations trying to keep up with global palm oil demand. Fortunately, many companies have switched to using certified, sustainable palm oil. For sweet occasions, use this [treat shopping guide](#) that will delight your loved ones and save forests and wildlife a world away. The guide features companies that are actively working to make a difference.
- *Join the [Forests for All](#) initiative.* When forests and green spaces thrive, so do animals and people. Together, we will protect, restore and sustain the local and global forests connected to our everyday lives in ways big and small.
- *Adopt an orangutan.* Show your love for orangutans by adopting one. The [ZooParent](#) program supports the zoo's animal care, education and wildlife conservation efforts in the Pacific Northwest and around the world.
- *Visit Woodland Park Zoo.* Every visit to the zoo contributes to the zoo's conservation mission.

Woodland Park Zoo offers a safe, outdoor experience for all. Visit www.zoo.org for information. Zoo hours: 9:30 a.m.–6:00 p.m. daily.

Accessibility: Information about accessibility and resources, one-to-one aides, sighted guides, mobility equipment rentals, and a sensory map and tools can be found at www.zoo.org/access. For questions or to request disability accommodations for zoo programs or events, contact zooinfo@zoo.org.

For more information or to become a zoo member, visit www.zoo.org or call 206.548.2500. Follow the zoo on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

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