

## ORANGUTANS

Orangutans are highly intelligent animals, sharing approximately 96% of our DNA. The name orangutan comes from the Malay word 'orang' for person, and 'hutan', which means forest, literally 'person of the forest'. Orangutans are the largest tree-dwelling animals in the world.



### RANGE OF THE ORANGUTAN:

Orangutans live in scattered populations in South East Asia on the islands of Borneo and Sumatra. Their habitat is lowland tropical rainforest, which offers them access to a wide range of food. They are the only great ape (apart from humans) to be found in Asia.



### SCIENTIFIC NAME:

*Pongo pygmaeus* (Bornean orangutan)

*Pongo abelii* (Sumatran orangutan)

**CLASS:** Mammalia

**ORDER:** Primates

**FAMILY:** Hominidae (great apes)

**GENUS:** Pongo

**DISTRIBUTION:** Borneo and Sumatra

### SIZE AND APPEARANCE:

Adult male orangutans are almost double the size of females, growing up to 1.5 metres in height and a maximum weight of 120 kilograms. The males have large cheek pads and a large pouch of skin under their chin. Orangutans have evolved for a life in the trees with both hands and feet adapted for gripping branches.

### BEHAVIOUR:

Unlike their close relatives, chimpanzees and gorillas, orangutans do not live in large social or family groups. The adult males are usually to be found alone and the females accompanied by one or two offspring. Adolescent orangutans may spend time together travelling in very small groups.

### DIET:

Orangutans spend a large part of their day roaming the forest for widely distributed food sources. They eat over 400 different types of food including fruit, leaves, tree bark, flowers, stems and occasionally insects, although they are mainly frugivorous (fruit eaters).

### LIFE EXPECTANCY:

It is thought that in the wild, orangutans can live beyond 50 years of age. The longest living orangutan in captivity lived to 58 years.



## CONSERVATION STATUS:

Fossil evidence suggests orangutans once ranged throughout Southeast Asia from Java (Indonesia) up into Laos and southern China. The orangutan populations in the wild are in a dramatic state of decline. Now they are only present on the islands of Borneo and Sumatra with best estimates of population sizes at around 54,000 and 6,600 on the islands, respectively.

Sumatran orangutans are classified as critically endangered and Bornean are as endangered as a result of the destruction and fragmentation of their habitat. A low reproductive rate and long birth intervals (one baby every seven to eight years) makes them particularly vulnerable. Though totally protected by law in Indonesia and by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, enforcement is extremely difficult in most areas.

## ORANGUTANS AND THEIR YOUNG:

Female orangutans usually give birth for the first time between ages 12 and 15. Males reach sexual maturity between the ages of eight and fifteen when they are fully grown, although development of the adult male secondary sexual characteristics - cheek pads and a throat pouch - may be delayed until they are twenty years old.

After a pregnancy of eight and a half months, the female orangutan usually gives birth to only one infant, on average every seven to eight years. The infants stay with their mother until they are at least seven years old, as they have a lot to learn before they can survive in the forest without her.



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## HOW CARE FOR THE WILD INTERNATIONAL IS HELPING ORANGUTANS:

Care for the Wild International (CWI) is working on several initiatives to save orangutans in conjunction with Orangutan Foundation, including the Orangutan Reintroduction Programme. Funding helps provide for young orphaned orangutans and guides them through their development until they are ready to return to the forest at the release site in Lamandau River Wildlife Reserve, Central Kalimantan, in Borneo. CWI also helps to protect the orangutans once they have been released by supporting a veterinary programme, forest patrols and guard posts. These orangutans have been given a second chance of living wild and we must do all we can to keep them safe and free.

## THREATS TO THE ORANGUTAN:

The greatest threat facing orangutans is destruction of their rainforest habitat by illegal logging, oil palm plantations, acacia plantations (for wood pulp), fire, mining and small-scale shifting cultivation. Under ideal conditions these semi-solitary animals roam the forests in search of widely distributed food sources but reduction of suitable habitat is forcing orangutan populations into smaller areas, which cannot support them. In the last 20 years, an estimated 80% of orangutan habitat has been lost.

The main threat to orangutans is habitat loss. However, this process of land clearing opens up previously inaccessible areas, exposing wild orangutans and consequently some are shot. If infant orangutans survive the death of their mothers, they either end up as orphans in one of the rehabilitation centres or they are sold into the exotic pet trade.



Find out more about CWI's work to protect orangutans and other wild animals at [www.careforthewild.com](http://www.careforthewild.com)

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