



# Orangutan habitat under threat

Saving the Sumatran rainforest means saving critically endangered species.

[rainforestrescue.org.au](http://rainforestrescue.org.au)



**rainforest  
rescue**  
Protect Rainforests Forever



© Carolyn Barry



© Carolyn Barry

## The Sumatran orangutan

There are estimated to be only 6,624 Sumatran orangutans left in the wild. Their numbers are thought to have declined by 91 per cent since 1900 and most of that decline has been in the last few decades.

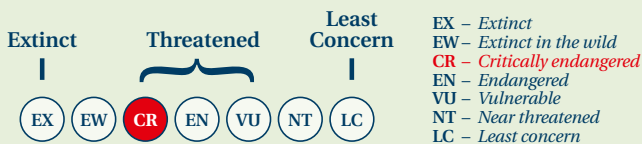
Orangutans are members of the great ape family of primates that includes their African cousins the chimpanzees, bonobos and gorillas. Orangutans are the only great apes found in Asia and the only ones that live almost entirely in trees. In fact, they are the largest tree-dwelling (arboreal) mammals on earth.

Historically, these wonderful animals were once found all over Asia, from northern India to southern China and further south to the Indonesian island of Java. Nowadays orangutans are found only on the islands of Borneo and Sumatra.

The Sumatran orangutan is listed as critically endangered, which means it is close to becoming extinct in the wild. These amazing animals are now found in just a handful of areas in Sumatra and 6,074 of the remaining Sumatran orangutans – and the most viable populations – live in the Gunung Leuser National Park and surrounding Leuser forests.



### Sumatran Orangutan Conservation Status



Graphic credit: Peter Halasz

## About the Gunung Leuser National Park

Gunung Leuser National Park is a rich, complex environment with a delicately balanced network of animal and plant life.

The GLNP is the core of many endangered and critically endangered species' remaining habitats, including the Sumatran tiger, Sumatran rhinoceros, Sumatran elephant, as well as the Sumatran

orangutan. Its unique flora and fauna also need urgent conservation and protection.

The park, together with the Bukit Barisan Selatan and Kerinci Seblat National Parks, forms the Tropical Rainforest Heritage of Sumatra UNESCO World Heritage Site and is considered to be of huge environmental importance.



## About the Orangutan Information Centre

**The Orangutan Information Centre works to educate the communities that live around the national park.**

They also aim to create sustainable livelihoods for people so that they do not need to rely on the many illegal trades inside the national park: oil palm crops, logging, or hunting wildlife for meat or the pet trade.

The centre is based in Medan, near the Gunung Leuser National Park. The organisation was founded in 2002 by Panut Hadisiswoyo, and is funded in part by the UK-based Sumatran Orangutan Society and Rainforest Rescue.

Panut is an inspiring Sumatran-born Indonesian. After his studies at the University of North Sumatra in Medan, where he gained a BA in English literature and linguistics, he achieved a Masters in communications studies from the University of Leeds in the UK. He also has a Masters of Science from the Oxford Brookes University and has dedicated himself to the conservation of Sumatran orangutans and their rainforest habitat.

**The Orangutan Information Centre works in many ways to make this mission a reality:**

• **Practical projects to restore the rainforest** – including cutting down illegal oil palm plantations and replanting the rainforest.

- **Patrolling the borders of the park** – to stop any illegal encroachment by local farmers and oil palm companies.
- **Local community outreach** – working with landholders on the edge of the national park to help them increase the productivity of their land. They are able to stay on their own land and make it more productive without turning to illegal activities in the national park for income.
- **The OranguVan** – a large van that takes palm oil education on the road and reaches out to hundreds of schools and communities around the national park.
- **Palm Oil Roadshow** – has taught people in over a dozen villages non-lethal ways to prevent orangutans from damaging food crops.
- **Tree nursery and seed-saving program** – to grow seedlings of original rainforest plants to assist with rainforest regeneration.
- **School Education Program** – staff have visited 150 schools to educate young people about the importance of protecting the national park and its wildlife.
- **Scholarship program** – funding four years tuition in biology, forestry and orangutan conservation at Medan University.

## The importance of local people in protecting the forest

**Indonesian people who live around the city of Medan and the Gunung Leuser National Park survive on just a few dollars a day.**

It is important to create sustainable livelihoods for local people so they are not reliant upon illegal activities, such as farming or logging inside the national park, or hunting wildlife for meat or the pet trade.

Providing long-term opportunities for local people to work in rainforest conservation or ecotourism is an essential part of any rainforest and orangutan conservation program.



*Panut Hadisiswoyo, founder of the Orangutan Information Centre, works with local communities to protect the amazing rainforest and the critically endangered Sumatran orangutans.*



## Palm oil destroying the rainforest and the orangutan

**The exploding development of palm oil is the single biggest threat to rainforests and orangutans in Indonesia.**

Oil palm conglomerates cut down and burn the rainforest. They use every inch of land to plant oil palms and, if they can, they will plant them inside national parks as well.

The seeds of the oil palm are used to produce palm oil. One hectare of oil palms can produce two tonnes of palm oil every month. This oil is used in biofuels, soaps, toothpaste, chocolate, biscuits, muesli and cosmetics, and is growing in demand everyday.

To a local resident with minimal income options, the opportunities presented by palm oil companies are attractive.

## The rainforest and climate change

**Rainforests around the world are disappearing at an alarming rate. Unfortunately, Indonesia is one of the countries leading in the deforestation of rainforests.**

Deforestation is one of the major contributors to the increase in greenhouse gases. In the tropics and subtropics it is causing approximately 20 per cent of all climate change.

If we don't win the fight against deforestation, we can't win the fight against climate change.

For more information or to donate, please call **1300 763 611** or visit **[rainforestrescue.org.au](http://rainforestrescue.org.au)**

**Please contact us:**  
Rainforest Rescue  
PO Box 40  
Mullumbimby, NSW 2482

### Sumatra's Disappearing Rainforest

1940



1980



1990



2000



*Information adapted from various materials courtesy of the Orangutan Information Centre*