

Indonesia launches a national Orangutan Conservation Strategy and Action Plan

The president of Indonesia, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, committed his government to saving the last remaining wild populations of orangutans at the World Climate Conference in Bali last December. He said, “to save the orangutans...we must save the forest and by that we are doing our part to reduce greenhouse gas emissions...without protection they will die out by 2050”. The plan involves reducing carbon emissions from deforestation. This currently accounts for **20% of total global emissions!** In addition, the many orangutans in rehabilitation centres will be returned to the wild by 2015. The plan also recognises that efforts to protect the orangutan must also protect the local people whose livelihoods depend on the forests. Around 1 million hectares of orangutan habitat in Sumatra and Borneo, which were due to be converted to oil palm plantations, will be saved. According to Dr. Erik Meijaard from the Orangutan Conservation Services Program (OCSP), “This could lead to 9,800 orangutans being saved and prevent 700 million tons of carbon from being released.” The action plan will bring a legal framework and international financial backing to orangutan conservation strategies – we look forward to bringing you more positive news of real results on the ground.

Restore Rainforest Appeal

Sincere thanks to everyone who has donated to our Restore Rainforest Appeal. We are working with the local government and villages to replant large areas of damaged orangutan habitat inside the Gunung Leuser National Park in North Sumatra. For every pound donated to this appeal, we will plant a rainforest tree seedling to restore these degraded areas. We have already raised enough to plant over 10,000 trees. Help us reach our goal of 25,000 trees by the end of the year! A legacy left to SOS by Kerry Gavin from Australia helped us a long way towards our target. We are delighted with the response to the appeal so far, but of course the orangutans need a lot more trees, so please keep donating through our website. You can also sponsor tree seedlings on behalf of a friend or family member with our Restore Rainforest gift packs – see our online shop or contact your local branch.



New look for SOS website - Visit: www.orangutans-sos.org

A massive “thank you” to tic-toc for the wonderful new site.

Check out the waving branches and animated logo! You can also visit our new online shop to purchase SOS merchandise and memberships.



Ten Years of SOS

By Lucy Wisdom
Founding Director

2007 marked the Sumatran Orangutan Society's tenth anniversary. On my last visit to Sumatra I was proud to see how our projects have flourished over the last decade. SOS can stand up and say, "We have made a difference in Sumatra".

But...there is still so much to be done.

The Sumatran Orangutan Society – Orangutan Information Centre (SOS-OIC), our project headquarters in Medan, is now managed by 12 full-time Indonesian staff. Our projects continue to grow. We are rapidly building a reputation as a grassroots organisation which makes a significant contribution to conservation in Sumatra. In 2007 we were able to purchase a second OranguVan which serves as a mobile education unit, bringing environmental awareness to communities living near the last remaining orangutan habitat.

I am delighted that more young inspired Indonesians are involved in conservation and research. We are especially proud of our tree nursery and greening programmes. We have now planted and maintained over a quarter of a million tree seedlings together with local communities in North Sumatra and Aceh. Our projects highlight the importance of environmental education and raising awareness. We run a scholarship programme for university students in North Sumatra, the Orangutan Friends Club, Conservation Camps, school visits and community training. These all leave a lasting legacy by empowering the next generation of Indonesians to protect their forests.

There is still so much to be done.

In recent years pressure has increased greatly on the last remaining orangutan habitat in both Sumatra and Borneo, mainly due to new oil palm plantations being established in high-conservation value areas. Indonesia is vying with Malaysia to become the world's largest producer of palm oil, at the expense of orangutan habitat. Ever increasing demand for biodiesel causes escalating rainforest destruction. Marketed as an "eco-friendly" alternative source of energy, the ecological damage associated with the unsustainable expansion of oil palm plantations is often ignored in the carbon equation.

There is still so much to be done.

The peace agreement in Aceh is holding after 29 years of civil war. This is excellent news but comes at a price; it has opened up the last lowland forests in Aceh for development – these forests are the last stronghold of the Sumatran orangutan.

Sumatran orangutans are classed as Critically Endangered. Around 80% of orangutan habitat has disappeared in the last twenty years. The population of Sumatran orangutans has dwindled from 25,000 to less than 7,000 in the 14 years that I have been working with them.

The time for action is NOW.

SOS has a holistic approach, recognising both human and environmental needs. As the charity continues to grow, we are able to spend more money than ever before on our field projects. I would like to thank everyone who has supported us; our staff - past and present, trustees, patrons, volunteers, donors, and members. SOS would not be where we are now without you. Over the last decade we have achieved great things. I have faith that we will accomplish even more in the future as we meet the many challenges ahead.

Thank You.



Biting Back against rainforest destruction

Confectionary company Chokolit is supporting SOS with the launch of the Biting Back Bar – a chocolate bar made using NO palm oil, a hidden ingredient in a huge number of products. Louis Barnett, who started the company two years ago when he was just 14 years old, is committed to raising awareness of the environmental dangers involved in the palm oil industry. A donation will be made to SOS for every bar sold – soon available to buy from the SOS online shop.

Campaign News: Biofuels are not the answer to Climate Change

The growth in palm oil, sugar cane and soya production has led to the destruction of some of the world's most biodiverse ecosystems, including orangutan habitat. The rising global demand for biofuels is pushing these industries to expand at an unsustainable rate. **Currently more carbon emissions result from deforestation and peat fires than are produced by the entire global transport sector.** A recent report placed Indonesia amongst the top three greenhouse gas emitters in the world, alongside the USA and China. Deforestation, peat land degradation and forest fires are responsible for around 75% of Indonesia's greenhouse gas emissions. **Slowing the rate of forest destruction is one of the cheapest and most effective ways to fight climate change.** There is significant evidence that leaving forests standing, rather than clearing the land for the production of biofuel crops such as palm oil, results in greater climate benefits, as well as preserving wildlife.

Find out more about the issue and what you can do to help on the Campaigns page of our website.



The 3rd annual Orangutan Caring Week in November was a great success, with many events taking place all around the world. The theme in 2007 was "expressing concern for orangutans through the arts and sciences". We held a series of events in Medan, including information displays and presentations in universities and public spaces, radio talk shows, city-centre banners and displays, and film screenings. The international branches of the SOS got involved, with film

screenings, presentations and lectures, and our orangutan costumes helped to spread the word! Orangutan Caring Week takes place in the second week of November each year – start planning what you can do to add your voice to the worldwide call to save the orangutans.

New Merchandise available

'Losing Tomorrow' DVD: This award-winning documentary by French filmmaker Patrick Rouxel poetically illustrates the critical situation in Indonesia for the orangutans' diminishing habitat. The film celebrates the beauty and biodiversity of the Indonesian rainforest, before showing the destruction which lies behind tropical hardwood flooring, a sheet of plywood, paper or a packet of potato chips.

Orangutan Toys: these soft and cuddly orangutan toys make the perfect gift.



Congratulations to SOS Founding Director Lucy Wisdom, who has been shortlisted for an Ethical Small Business Award. Triodos bank hosts the annual Women in Ethical Business Awards to celebrate female entrepreneurs who are "blazing a trail for doing business in a way that benefits people and the environment". You can vote for Lucy through the link on the front page of our website, and help her receive recognition for all her hard work for orangutans and forests in Sumatra. Voting is open until 5th June.

Important milestones for orangutan conservation over the last decade

Over the last century, the number of orangutans living in the rainforests of Sumatra and Borneo has dropped by over 91%. Here we take a look back at significant events over the last decade that have affected the conservation of orangutans and their habitat.

1997

Lucy Wisdom founded the Sumatran Orangutan Society after several years volunteering for months at a time at the Bohorok Orangutan Centre, North Sumatra. Bohorok was officially closed in 1997, leaving Sumatra without an active orangutan rehabilitation centre. Borneo had four centres at this time.

Fires swept across Indonesia, burning millions of hectares of forests, causing the deaths of thousands of wild orangutans, mainly in Kalimantan.

1998

Indonesia was once again affected by devastating fires, described as the worst recorded this century, which covered the entire region and neighbouring countries with a thick smoke.

The 3rd International Great Apes of the World Conference took place in Kuching, Malaysia. SOS presented a paper highlighting the lack of facilities in Sumatra for orangutan rescue and rehabilitation.

1999

SOS took part in confiscations of 5 orangutans from hotels and private Indonesian citizens in Bali with Willie Smits, founder of the Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation. The orangutans were returned to Borneo.

2000

Scientists re-classified Sumatran and Bornean orangutans as separate species. IUCN (the International Union for the Conservation of Nature) upgraded the Sumatran orangutan's status to Critically Endangered. The Bornean orangutan is classified as Endangered.

2001

The Leuser Ecosystem was acknowledged as one of the world's most important biodiversity hotspots, and was designated a UNESCO Tropical Rainforest Heritage Site.

The Sumatran Orangutan Society – Orangutan Information Centre (SOS-OIC) was established in Medan. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) launched GRASP – the Great Ape Survival Project. This was a new approach to save Great Apes, working with governments across the Great Ape habitat countries in Africa and South-east Asia.

2002

A new organisation, the Sumatran Orangutan Conservation Program (SOCP), established a new quarantine centre and release site in Sumatra, and started to accept orangutans for their rehabilitation program.

Scientists announced that different patterns of behaviour between different populations of orangutans show evidence of culture, including tool use and communication. Transmission of cultural knowledge in orangutans and other great apes has implications for understanding the evolution of human culture.

Uncontrolled forest fires once again raged throughout Borneo and Sumatra. The fires were started mainly by farmers clearing land for plantations, and were exacerbated by the El Niño weather phenomenon. They caused a severe health hazard to people and wildlife, and the smoke reached as far as Thailand and northern Australia.

2003

On November 2nd, a flash flood swept through the village of Bukit Lawang, site of the Bohorok Orangutan Centre. Earthquakes the previous month triggered small landslides, blocking the river in several dams. One night these burst, causing the flood. The river rose 15 metres in 15 minutes. Over 230 people were killed and hundreds were made homeless. Two orangutans also died in the flood.



2004

Following a Population and Habitat Viability Analysis (PHVA), experts estimated that less than 7,300 Sumatran orangutans remain in the wild.

On 26th December, a tsunami killed over 225,000 people in eleven countries, the majority in Indonesia. The epicentre was located just off the west coast of Northern Sumatra, and coastal communities in Aceh were devastated by the natural disaster. At this time Aceh was still under martial law, making it difficult for large international aid organisations to enter the province. With our mainly local Indonesian staff, SOS-OIC began to help immediately with aid and emergency support. This disaster work continued for 3 months.

In October the Sebangau forests in Central Kalimantan were designated a National Park by the Indonesian government, securing the protection of thousands of Bornean orangutans

2005

On August 15th, a peace agreement was signed between Acehese rebel movement GAM and the Indonesian Government. GAM had been fighting for independence from the government for 29 years. The "Oil for Ape Scandal" report was released, bringing the world's attention to the link between the palm oil industry and the decline of orangutan populations and habitat.

SOS handed over 30,000 petition signatures to the Indonesian Environment Minister, objecting to the construction of the proposed "Ladia Galaska" road network through the Leuser Ecosystem.

Six Sumatran orangutans were repatriated to Indonesia after they had been illegally smuggled to Malaysia. They were sent to the Sumatran Orangutan Conservation Programme rehabilitation project.

A ground-breaking intergovernmental agreement was signed on September 9th: 18 Great Ape habitat countries, including Indonesia, signed the Kinshasa Declaration, pledging to protect the Great Apes.

2006

54 orangutans illegally smuggled to Thailand were returned to Indonesia after 3 years of campaigning. The orangutans were forced to entertain tourists by performing in boxing matches at Safari World, a private zoo in Bangkok. They were sent to the Nyaru Menteng Orangutan Reintroduction Project in Kalimantan. This was the largest repatriation of smuggled orangutans ever to take place. Unfortunately, they were all infected with hepatitis, so can never be released into the wild, as this would put wild populations at risk.

2007

In February the United Nations released the report 'The Last Stand of The Orangutan', which indicated that orangutans would be extinct in the wild by 2012 if current rates of habitat loss continued.

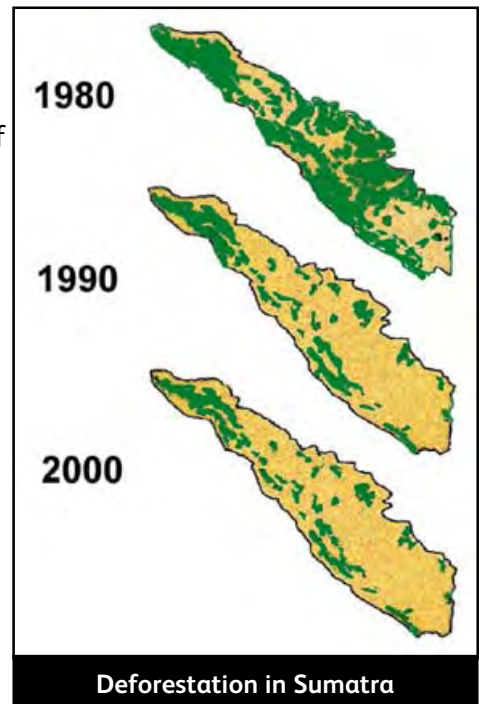
A Presidential decree banned the burning and draining of peat lands; the Minister for the Environment banned the conversion of primary forests to oil palm plantations.

The new Governor of Aceh declared a logging moratorium as part of an effort to develop new long-term sustainable forest management.

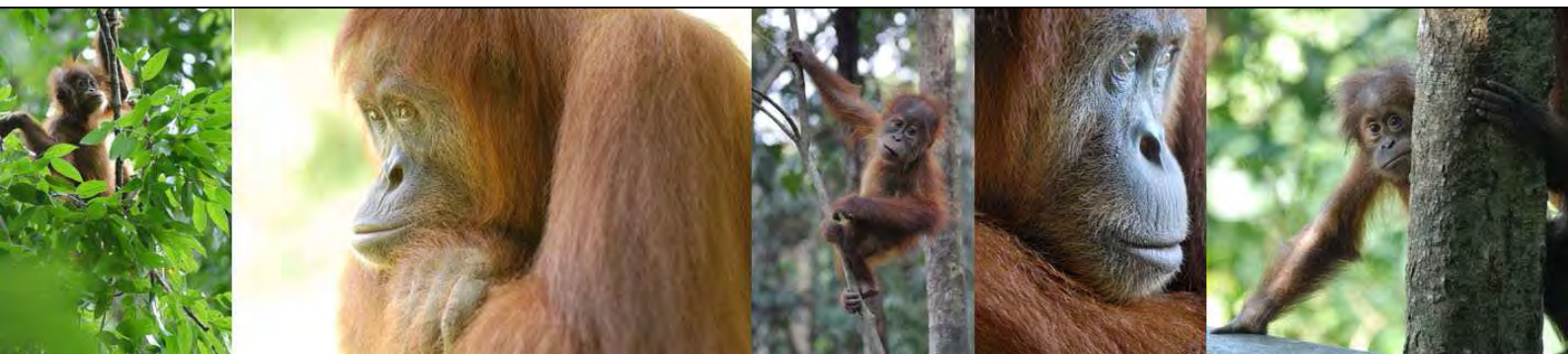
In December the President of Indonesia launched an Orangutan Conservation Action Plan at the global UN climate conference in Bali

2008

New survey data revealed that the population of Sumatran orangutans stands at only 6,900, and the Bornean population at 50,000 apes.



Photos: Nick Tignonsini





The History of the Orangutan Information Centre

Our projects in Sumatra operate through the Orangutan Information Centre (SOS-OIC). We founded this organization in 2001 with a group of dedicated Indonesian conservationists. The SOS-OIC raises awareness of environmental and orangutan conservation issues amongst local communities living in North Sumatra and Aceh. Environmental education is at the heart of all our work in Sumatra. We enable people living near the last remaining orangutan habitat to work towards a more sustainable future for their forests.

Starting in a small office with a team of volunteers, the SOS-OIC has now grown to fill a large office with twelve full-time staff, and twelve volunteers. Through the enthusiasm of several passionate conservationists, generous donations and the scientific and financial support of SOS partners, the SOS-OIC has gained momentum and expanded from a small NGO into a well-respected and effective organisation, operating at the forefront of Sumatran orangutan conservation, and leads the way with environmental education in North Sumatra.

As one of the Sumatran orangutan's key allies, the SOS-OIC team works tirelessly to help prevent their extinction, through practical, long-lasting initiatives. Our projects, past and present, range from replanting tsunami-devastated mangroves in Aceh and restoring degraded areas of the Gunung Leuser National Park and its buffer zones in North Sumatra, to running hugely popular Orangutan Festivals for local school children and touring educational roadshows. We have pioneered a conservation curriculum for schools in North Sumatra, and sustainable alternative livelihoods projects for communities living on the edge of the forest. We have helped establish a scholarship programme for local university students to promote orangutan research. We have two OranguVans on the road, spreading conservation messages far and wide and bringing mobile environmental cinema to local communities. We have now planted more than a quarter of a million tree seedlings across northern Sumatra.

With there being so few Sumatran orangutans left in the wild, the work done by organisations such as the SOS-OIC is invaluable. It can only carry on through the continued support of friends and donors. With a combined effort, there is hope for the future of wild orangutans, and the SOS-OIC plans to make sure this opportunity is used to ensure the survival of the Sumatran orangutan, the gentlest of apes.



The SOS-OIC Team

If you would like to make a donation to support our work, please contact your local branch of SOS or visit the website: www.orangutans-sos.org

Congratulations to Panut Hadisiswoyo, founder of the SOS-OIC, for being awarded a scholarship to study for his Masters degree in Primate Conservation at Oxford Brookes University, UK! Panut was also invited to Buckingham Palace to meet the Queen and tell her about the threats facing orangutans in the wild, and about our projects.

Visit the SOS-OIC website at www.orangutancentre.org



The History of SOS

The first SOS office was established in Bali in 1996, and officially achieved non-profit status in 1999. For ten years we used the logo above. As a popular conference location, Bali often hosts representatives from the Indonesian government and international NGOs – this has given us the chance to build a conservation network which has been invaluable in setting up our own field projects through the SOS-OIC. Most recently, the World Climate Conference was hosted in Bali in December 2007. Additionally, Bali has been identified as a hub for illegal trade in protected species, and the SOS team in Bali has been involved in confiscating captive orangutans. The Bali office is also responsible for sourcing much of our wonderful merchandise. This is available through our new online shop and all SOS branches. It supports our education, awareness and fundraising activities around the world.

SOS USA was started by Chris Stone and Armando Lodigiani in 1997. This was also the year we received our first big donation for core operational costs from Paul Mitchell. Chrissie Hynde, lead singer of The Pretenders, has been a supporter since the early days, and as well as being a patron, she continues to give regular donations to the charity. Cindy Bowen stepped in to run the US branch after travelling to Bukit Lawang as a volunteer. In 2005, Rich Zimmerman took over for 2 years, before handing the branch over to Avanti Mallapur. Cindy says, “It has been exciting to see the SOS grow into the wonderful organisation it is today. I like to think that, because of SOS, the Sumatran orangutans might have more of a fighting chance against extinction.”

SOS became a UK-registered charity in 2001 and former Bohorok volunteer Katy Jenkyns was appointed as branch co-ordinator, working from her spare room. SOS developed quickly and we moved into our first office space in Brighton in 2002. Our education programmes expanded, membership and support grew and SOS shifted focus from providing assistance to the orangutans at the Government-run Bohorok centre, to setting up and funding new grassroots projects, including the Orangutan Information Centre (SOS-OIC) in Medan. SOS UK moved to Norwich in 2003, when Jan Howard took over as coordinator. We moved once again to Oxford in 2005, now run by Helen Buckland, with Jo Butler as a new addition to the UK team in 2007. Katy says, “I felt a real sense of achievement and privilege to have been part of such a wonderful team, and so long as such dedication continues, Sumatran orangutans and the vital ecosystem they inhabit have a real chance of survival.”

A message from Jan: “It was a privilege to be part of the SOS family from early on and I was thrilled to sit in the UK ‘driving seat’ for a few years. In that time SOS has grown dramatically with a number of successful projects making a difference overseas. None of SOS’s achievements would have been possible without the determination of one lady and that is Founder Lucy Wisdom. Lucy has been an inspiration to me and to many others. The problems facing the orang-utan and its forest home have not changed. There is much to do. I hope SOS can continue to make a difference and that in another ten years there are still orangutans living wild in the forests of Sumatra”.

SOS Australia was established in 2005 by Karen Lawrence, and currently operates on a part-time basis. Anyone wishing to become involved with helping SOS Australia to grow would be greatly appreciated. The SOS branch in New Zealand was managed by Vicki Baker, and then taken over by Nick and Rachel Major in 2004. We participate in the Palm Oil Action Group to highlight the plight of the orangutan, and what palm oil costs the Earth.

We would like to thank all the wonderful supporters and volunteers that have helped SOS grow over the last 10 years. Thank You.



These eye-catching door hangers are an excellent and simple way to raise awareness of the plight of the Sumatran orangutan. They are available through our online shop, and sent as a free gift to new members. Please contact us if you are able to help us distribute them through a hotel, guesthouse, or any other ideas are welcome! Thank you to hat-trick for designing them.

Pioneering forest carbon project in Sumatra

A new agreement between conservation agencies and the governor of Sumatra's Aceh province will lead to the protection of 1.8 million hectares of rainforest, home to Sumatran orangutans, tigers and elephants. Deforestation of the Ulu Masen forests in Aceh will be decreased by up to 85%, stopping the release of 100 million tonnes of carbon dioxide. This will be the world's first REDD (Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation) project, generating millions of dollars for forest protection and community development from carbon credits. REDD projects encourage the protection of forests by placing a financial value on the services they provide, such as carbon storage, making trees more valuable standing than felled. As well as being crucial habitat for countless species, the Ulu Masen forests provide water to over 5 million people in Aceh.

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