



ORANGUTANS

QUICK FACTS:

POPULATION: Less than 60,000

AREA OF DISTRIBUTION: Live in the rainforest of Borneo and Sumatra

SOCIAL: Males live alone and females live with infants

HEIGHT: Male 4.5 feet, female 3.5 feet

REACH: The arms of an orangutan can have a reach of more than 8 feet

WEIGHT: Male 130 - 200 lbs, female 90 - 120 lbs

LIFESPAN: In the wild 35 - 50 years

NUMBER OF BABIES: 1 at a time, every 6 -7 years

FOOD: Tropical fruits, leaves, sprouts, bark and insects. Have the ability to eat unripe fruits which gives them an advantage to other fruits eaters.

The name “orangutan” literally translates into English as “man of the forest”. It comes from Malay and Bahasa Indonesian *orang* (man) and *hutan* (forest).

Orangutans are extremely intelligent creatures who clearly have the ability to reason and think. Their similarity to us is uncanny. Baby orangutans cry when they’re hungry, whimper when they’re hurt and smile at their mothers. They express emotions just like we do: joy, fear, anger, surprise.... it’s all there. If you take a few minutes and watch an orangutan, you’ll swear they’re just like us. And they kind of are....

Orangutans are large, but in general are quite gentle. Large males can be aggressive, but for the most part they keep to themselves. They are uniquely arboreal— living their lives quietly up in the trees away from predators... and only descending to the forest floor when they must. Were it not for the occasional squealing of a baby or calling out of a big male, you would hardly even know they were there. They don’t bother anyone. They don’t want anything to do with us. They’re too busy getting on with their lives.

Local Indonesian mythology has it that orangutans actually have the ability to speak, but choose not to, fearing they would be forced to work if were they ever caught. Legends aside, even if this were the case, who could blame them?

In prehistoric times, orangutans lived throughout Asia— roaming as far north as China. Today deforestation and the spread of humans have limited the untouched rainforest to a few remaining areas in Borneo and Sumatra. It is only on these two islands that there are large enough forest areas to sustain a viable breeding population of orangutans. But even here the forest is rapidly disappearing. During the last 50 years their habitat has been eaten away by urban growth, plantations and farmland. The spreading of oil palm plantations - unless it is stopped - could spell the end of all wild orangutans...

While exact numbers are unknown, one thing is for sure: the number of orangutans in the wild is decreasing drastically. In Sumatra the latest calculations show that orangutan numbers have been reduced from 12,000 in 1993 to only about 6,500 today. In Borneo fewer than 40,000 orangutans are believed to remain.

For more orangutan facts, please visit redapes.org.

