

# current conservation

kids



Prabha Malliya



# SAVING THE PEOPLE OF THE FOREST

My name is Ricko Jaya and I am 33 years old. I first fell in love with the “People of the Forest”, the meaning of “Orang Hutan” in the Indonesian language, when I was a student. They are truly incredible but also critically endangered, mostly because their home in the Indonesian rainforest is shrinking due to deforestation and large scale agriculture expansion. Less than 15,000 of them are still roaming freely in the wild forests on the island of Sumatra. So I decided to take action.

Now I am a veterinarian at the Orangutan Information Centre, an organisation which cares for injured Sumatran orangutans (*Pongo abelii*), and works to protect them and their habitat. We intervene when orangutans get too close to villages and could start raiding local farmers’ crops. Follow me today and I will describe to you how we save these beautiful creatures!

It is August 21st, and I have received a phone call from a ‘local’ farmer, living 8 hours away from Medan, the capital city of North Sumatra province, where I live. He and his friends have spotted a large male orangutan stranded in a deforested area, near their fruit orchards. He is malnourished and far from the forest with no high trees around for him to build his nest, in which he sleeps at



night. I call my team, and the five of us prepare our equipment: ropes, a strong cage, veterinary supplies, and a landing net. We will drive all night to reach the village, then take a small boat to where we will finally find the orangutan. During an emergency case like this one, we forget sleep: the safety of the orangutan comes first!

Now begins the most stressful part—catching the orangutan. He is big and scared and tired, so before we can catch him, we must put him to sleep using a tranquiliser dart. This doesn’t hurt the big boy, but it means we can transport him safely. One of the team takes aim with a tranquiliser gun. He fires and the dart hits the back of the orangutan, who will soon start to feel sleepy. Meanwhile, the rest of the team prepares a large landing net. After a few minutes, the male orangutan is falling asleep and begins slowly moving towards the ground. Soon we have him in the net.

The most difficult part of the mission is accomplished!

Now, it is a race to get everything done before he starts to wake up. I have 10-15 minutes to conduct a medical check-up, make sure he is not injured, and provide vitamins and food supplements. Then we put him in a cage on the back of our pick-up truck and drive to the national park. The cage is heavy as it must be strong, and the orangutan weighs some 80 kilos. We reach a safe, quiet spot on the edge of the national park and lift the cage down. Most of the team now move back while one of us opens the door. The big orangutan slowly emerges from the cage, and turning towards us a last time, he climbs up into lianas and branches. I am sure he winked at us to say “thank you” before disappearing into the rainforest. Mission accomplished!

Good luck big boy!



Special thanks to Fabien Garnier for his help with this article.

If you want to know more about the work of the Orangutan Information Centre and would like to support us, you can visit our websites:

-<http://orangutancentre.org/>  
-<http://www.orangutans-sos.org/>

Or follow us on Facebook:  
-<https://www.facebook.com/Orangutan-Information-Centre-249175758613943/?fref=ts>

-<https://www.facebook.com/orangutanssos/>



# The Person of the Forest



Humans are closely related to orangutans. We share 96.4% of our DNA with them. We and they evolved from the same early ape ancestor, splitting from them about 13 million years ago.

Orangutans can live for around 45 years in the wild.

They don't live in groups like the other great apes, although the relationship



between females and their offspring remains close for years after the young can feed and look after themselves.

Females have their first offspring when they are 15-16 years old and will usually have no more than 3 offspring in their lifetimes.

Orangutans eat ripe fruit and find over 90% of their food in the forest canopy.

Because their food is often scattered and unpredictable, orangutans spend up to 60% of their time finding food and eating. Orangutans also sleep in the tree tops and make new 'nests' each night made by bending branches into a platform to support their weight. These nests can be 100 feet above the ground and males can weigh 80 kilos, so the nests need to be strong!



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Orangutans are one of the five species of great ape. The others are humans, chimpanzees, bonobos and gorillas.

Once widespread throughout the forests of Asia, orangutans are now found on just two islands in Indonesia, Sumatra and Borneo. Each island has its own unique species.

Indigenous people of Indonesia and Malaysia call this ape "*Orang Hutan*," which literally translates as "Person of the Forest".

Orangutans are very intelligent, and have even been seen making simple tools.



*Twigs* to scratch themselves.

*Leafy branches* to shelter themselves from rain and sun.

*Branches* as tools during insect foraging and honey collection, and for protection against stinging insects.

*Tools* to extract some seeds from their shells that can contain stinging hairs.

*Leaves* as gloves to help them handle spiny fruits and branches, or as seat cushions in spiny trees.

*Leaves* as napkins to wipe their chins. Good table manners are important, even in the forest!



Both species of orangutan are highly endangered. One hundred years ago, there were thought to be 315,000 orangutans in the wild. There are now less than 1/4 of this number left: 14,600 in Sumatra, and less than 54,000 in Borneo. The main causes of their decline are cutting down trees for building and agriculture and poaching for meat and the pet industry. Because females have only three offspring in their lifetimes, orangutan populations grow very slowly, and take a long time to recover from habitat disturbance and hunting. This is why the work of organisations like the Sumatran Orangutan Society and the Orangutan Information Centre is so important.



# BEYOND THE **classroom**

## REDISCOVERING **nature**

An Initiative by Kalpanadham in association with Gram Vikas

Satyabhama Majhi and her group led a nature exploration workshop that was organised at Vidya Vihar school, in the Ganjam district of Odisha. Ninety five percent of the children at the school come from tribal communities.

The idea of the workshop was to introduce children and teachers to the concept of creativity through the life forms. The screening of “Rivers and Tides”, based on the British artist, sculptor and photographer—Andy Goldsworthy’s work, created much curiosity amongst the participants about using brightly coloured flowers, icicles, leaves, mud, stones, rocks, pinecones, snow, stone, twigs, stems, roots, thorns, etc. The participants worked at five locations.

### *The Pond*

‘The lollipop’, a spiral, which symbolizes desires, aspirations and dreams. On realization of their dreams, the fulfillment, accomplishment and happiness provides for their families and community. Amazingly all the children knew how and where to dig the earth without having to be taught!



### *The River Stream*

After much experimentation with sand, berries and leaves the children still felt something was amiss. There were no flowers! In the heat of Odisha, it was difficult for the delicate flowers to bloom in the summer heat. ‘The Giant Stone Flower’, grown in a pot zigzags its way into a fine full bloom by the flowing river.



### *Sasmita’s Garden*

As the group of children were interacting with the villagers in an “adivaasi” (Tribal) cluster, they met a young girl named Sasmita. Her home was painted with terracotta and cowdung paste. She told the children about her dream of having a garden with flowers and butterflies around her home. A vibrant colorful garden was created, and it will continue to thrive in the relentless summer heat!

### *Amo Khelo Gharo, Our Play Home*

Creating play in the playground— the children found different kinds of wood for the structures. Some thick and strong, others needed to be thin and flexible. ‘The Giant Swing’, ‘The 3D sea-saw’, which moves sideways and round in a circle, and ‘Hula Hoops’. And from everything around them, a play home was created!





## *Mancha, The Tree House*

A mancha is a quiet rest place in the middle of the jungle. Made from dried branches and grass, decorated with origami butterflies, jute-rope-ringing curtains, Mancha is a resting spot. Craftily placed tags tell us about the various species found in surrounding jungle.



## *The flip side*

Jim Jourdane illustrates some of the misadventures experienced by field biologists



Jim Jourdane (fieldworkfail.com)

### *Ambika Kamath*

A lizard that had eluded capture for weeks jumped on my head and ran down the entire length of me. I still couldn't catch it.