

Orangutans: Forest Friends in Need

Orangutan means “person of the forest” in the Malay language. Orangutans are great apes. They belong to the family of primates that includes gorillas, chimpanzees, and bonobos.

Wild orangutans live on two islands—Sumatra and Borneo—in Southeast Asia. Both Sumatran orangutans and Bornean orangutans are primarily arboreal. This means they spend most of their time in trees. Orangutans have long and powerful arms. Their arms help them climb and swing between trees in the rainforest. They also have long fingers and toes that help them grasp tree branches.

Orangutans are frugivores. This means that they mostly eat fruit. They also eat leaves, flowers, and sometimes insects. Over 300 different types of food have been found in their diet. Orangutans play a very important role in spreading fruit and plant seeds in the forest. This helps to keep their rainforest home healthy.

There are many ways orangutans show that they are smart and intelligent. They create and use tools to remove seeds from fruit. They also use tools to capture insects from the insides of trees. Orangutans memorize the rainforest where they live. This helps them know which trees have ripe fruit. They build a sleeping nest each night made of branches and leaves.

Male orangutans live alone. Female orangutans live with their babies or with young orangutans. Orangutans can live to be over 50 years old.

Bornean and Sumatran orangutans are critically endangered species. This means they are at a very high risk of disappearing forever. Scientists estimate that there are less than 55,000 Bornean orangutans remaining in the wild. They believe there are less than 7,000 Sumatran orangutans left in the rainforests.

Orangutans face many threats due to human activity. Young orangutans are sometimes captured and sold as pets. Orangutans are also hunted for food.

The biggest threat facing orangutans is the destruction of their rainforest home. Scientists estimate that 80% of their forest home has been lost in the last 20 years. Rainforests in Borneo and Sumatra are being destroyed to create palm oil plantations. Millions of acres of forest are cut down and burned each year. Palm oil is the most widely produced edible vegetable oil. Palm oil can be found in candy bars, cookies, and crackers. It is also used to make shampoos, soaps, and pet food. Most of the palm oil produced in the world is grown in Borneo and Sumatra.

Wildlife organizations are working hard to help protect the remaining rainforests. If the rainforests disappear, orangutans will disappear forever.

Questions

1. Where do wild orangutans live?
2. How do we know orangutans are smart?
3. What needs to be saved in order to save orangutans?
4. What is a frugivore?

Vocabulary List

Each of the vocabulary words below are used in the reading passage. As you read the passage, pay attention to context clues that suggest the word's meaning.

1. arboreal
2. frugivores
3. critically
4. endangered
5. edible

Context Clues

Using context clues from the sentences in the passage, underline the correct meaning of the word in boldface.

1. "Both Sumatran orangutans and Bornean orangutans are primarily **arboreal**"
a. living in trees b. awake at night c. left-handed d. strong climbers
2. "Orangutans are **frugivores**. This means that they mostly eat fruit"
a. slow to digest food b. constant eaters c. fruit eaters d. allergic to meat
3. "Bornean and Sumatran orangutans are **critically** endangered species"
a. extremely or severely b. secretly; confidentially c. slightly; somewhat d. nearly
4. "Bornean and Sumatran orangutans are critically **endangered** species"
a. misunderstood b. endearing; charming c. unusual; strange d. in danger or threatened
5. "Palm oil is the most widely produced **edible** vegetable oil"
a. valuable; costly b. able to be eaten; digestible c. affordable; cheap d. popular; favored