

Bornean Orang-utan



The orang-utan, with its distinctive red-orange hair, is the only ape that inhabits Asia. Weighing up to 90 kg, the Bornean orang-utan is about 1-1.5 m tall with an arm span as long as 2.5 m.

Living in the rainforest canopies on the island of Borneo in Southeast Asia, the Bornean Orang-utan is physically well-adapted to its environment. Strong hands and hand-like feet, along with flexible hips and long arms allow the orang-utan to live mostly in treetops.

Swinging from tree to tree, orang-utans feed on fruit, leaves, bark, flowers, and insects. They travel long distances to eat their favourite fruits (usually unripe), knowing which ones are in season and where to find them. They drink water captured in leaves when available, and in drier times, they soak up moisture from tree hollows.



Each night, they build nests in the treetops with leaves and branches. Because of this, they have little need to go onto the ground, where their hand-like feet and long arms make walking very difficult.

A mother orang-utan will nurse her babies for 6-7 years. Although orang-utans reach maturity at 8 years old, females will stay with their mothers up until their teen years to learn essential parenting skills. Only then are they capable of rearing their own young. As female orang-utans only give birth every 8 years, their rate of reproduction is very slow. In this way, orang-utan populations take years to recover when hit with natural disasters and human encroachment.

Why are orang-utans important?

They play a **vital** role in seed dispersal and in maintaining the health of the forest ecosystem, which is important for people and a host of other animals, including tigers, Asian elephants and Sumatran rhinos. So by conserving the orang-utan's habitat, we're also benefiting local communities and other species.

Conservation Status

Now, due to deforestation and poaching, Bornean orang-utans have been restricted to the island of Borneo with their population reduced to 50,000-60,000. They are currently classified on the [International Union for Conservation of Nature \(IUCN\) Red List](#) as critically endangered, with their population severely broken up and decreasing.

Many of the issues surrounding orang-utan depopulation is because Indonesia is so poor. Facing poverty and starvation, many Indonesians have turned to eating orang-utan meat, illegal logging, capturing babies for pet trade, and using slash and burn techniques to turn portions of the rainforest into palm oil plantations. Slashing and burning has resulted not only in a reduction of fruit trees and habitat for orang-utans, it has also increased natural forest fires, causing widespread destruction.

What You Can Do to Help

Apart from donating to the many orang-utan charities around the world, there are many other things you can do to help save the orang-utan on day-to-day basis. For starters, avoid purchasing tropical or exotic plywood and hardwood, palm oil-based products, and rayon viscose clothing. In addition, reduce your consumption of paper, and seek out recycled "treeless" paper sources.

Bornean Orangutan Distribution



Bornean orangutans live on the Southeast Asian island of Borneo.