Sumatran Orangutan

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Goals

• Address the background of the Sumatran Orangutan
• Research into life histories and awareness
• Describe the threats facing the orangutan in the wild
• Look at conservation and reintroduction attempts
• *Pongo abelli*
  • Bornean: *Pongo pygmaeus*

• Only Asiatic Great Ape genus

• Sexually dimorphic
  • Males: up to 1.4 m, 80+ kg
  • Female: up to 1.1 m, 35+ kg

• Less than 6,600 individuals in the wild – Critically Endangered

• Restricted to forest patches in Northern Sumatra
Background

- Reddish/orange fur

- Highly arboreal – quadrumanous locomotion

- Territorial in both sexes
  - Flanged or unflanged males

- Less gregarious than other great apes
  - Ranges: 800-1500ha for females

- Mostly frutivores although important deviations
Life History

• Lifespan: Males: 58+, Females: 53+

• Age at first reproduction: 15.4

• Interbirth interval: 8.2-9.3 years

• Males disperse while females remain in natal area

• Exist in a metapopulation of at least 3 genetically distinct subpopulations
Intelligence and Culture

• Many findings of cultural learning

• Self medication using non-dietary plants and soil consumption

• A study using orphaned individuals from 2 different populations where stick use both occurred and did not occur introduced to 2 tasks testing their skills at stick use
  • Demonstrated a lack of genetic explanation for stick use skill level and a “cultural” awareness

• Complex information seeking strategies
  • Determine whether to learn more based on cost to learn, likelihood of error, and value of reward
Threats

• Biggest threats are from
  • Habitat destruction
  • Kills by humans
  • Illegal pet trade

• Replacement of natural habitat with oil palm

• Additional threats from disease
  • Human parasites
Reintroduction/Conservation

• Attempted PVAs to facilitate reintroduction into central Sumatra with limited success

• Difficulties due to captive individuals not knowing how to care for their young

• Most wild individuals within the bounds of national parks

• Current research into controlling conflicts between agriculture and orangutans
Summary

• Threatened by loss of habitat and exacerbated by lack of connections among suitable habitat

• Protections need better enforcement and the development of “orangutan friendly” mentality

• Better organization among conservation groups is required
Selected Bibliography


• Photo credit: Prof. Tom Hilde