



PRESS RELEASE

Joint Press Release by:-

- 1. PanEco Foundation (Switzerland)**
- 2. Natural Resources Conservation Agency (BKSDA) Aceh**
- 3. Yayasan Ekosistem Lestari (YEL) Medan**

Two more illegal pet orangutans confiscated from Tripa peat swamp forest area, Aceh, Indonesia

Banda Aceh (28th March 2013)

On Wednesday morning (27th March) another two young orangutans arrived at the Sumatran Orangutan Conservation Programme's Orangutan Quarantine Centre near Medan, North Sumatra, Indonesia. Both were confiscated by a team comprising SOCP veterinarians and staff of the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry's Natural Resources Conservation Agency in Aceh (BKSDA Aceh).

Both orangutans were being kept illegally, at two different locations in the village of Simpang Dua, Nagan Raya District. Almost certainly both were captured in the nearby Tripa peat swamp forests, known internationally due to high profile legal cases against palm oil companies operating illegally there.

"We see this happening over and over again in Tripa," explained Dr Ian Singleton, Director of the SOCP. "Palm oil companies clear the forest completely, then burn what's left, leaving a totally barren landscape. Almost none of the wildlife living in such areas survives this process, and that includes orangutans. Orangutans often die of gradual starvation or are deliberately killed by local people or plantation workers. When the animal killed is a female with an infant, if the infant is lucky enough to survive, it is often then taken as a pet, or to try and sell. This is almost certainly what happened with these two and they are just two of many that we have confiscated in the Tripa area over the last few years," he added.

The two orangutans, a female named Meisin, approx. 5 years old, and a young male named Upin, only about 2 years old. Travelled to the SOCP's quarantine

centre overnight and are now settling in to their new home. Each will undergo thorough medical checks in the next few days and a minimum 1 month quarantine isolation period, to ensure no new diseases appear. Only then can they be mixed with other similar orangutans and begin the process of rehabilitation.

“The older of the two is clearly underweight for his age but is enthusiastic about food and should soon be up to normal weight. Both were kept in small cages at the back of their owners homes.” reported drh Ikhsani Surya Hidayat, the senior veterinarian on the confiscation team. “The two orangutans were found in reasonable condition although they were clearly too hot in their exposed cages, especially due to the zinc roofs they had,” he added.

After a period of time at the quarantine center both young orangutans will eventually be returned to the wild at SOCP’s orangutan reintroduction centre in Jantho, Aceh Besar, where a new population of the Critically Endangered species is being established. To date the SOCP has released over 150 orangutans at its other reintroduction centre in Jambi Province, and now 37 at the new site in Jantho.

“The smallest one, Upin, was being kept by a local policeman from Polres Nagan Raya, even though its against the law to keep an orangutan as a pet in Indonesia” noted Asril, Operations Manager for the SOCP, tasked with organizing the confiscations. “Unfortunately its quite common for us to find police and military personnel keeping orangutans illegally. The problem is that there is seldom ever any law enforcement associated with these cases and illegal pet orangutan owners know that the chances of them being prosecuted are almost zero. This is something that simply has to change if we are ever to bring an end to the illegal killing and capture of wildlife,” he added.

Head of provincial Natural Resources Conservation Agency in Aceh (BBKSDA Aceh) Mr. Amon Zamora, MSc appealed to all parties to desist from capturing orangutans or keeping them as pets as it is a clear violation of Indonesian National Law. “It is totally illegal under Indonesian law to kill, capture, trade or keep an orangutan as a pet, punishable by up to 5 years in prison and a 100 million rupiah fine (approximately US\$10,000),” he stressed.

The Sumatran Orangutan Conservation Programme (SOCP; www.sumatranorangutan.org) is a collaborative programme involving the Swiss based PanEco Foundation (www.paneco.ch), Indonesia’s Yayasan Ecosystem Lestari (www.yelweb.org) and the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry’s Directorate General of Forest Protection and Nature Conservation (Ditjen PHKA; www.dephut.go.id)

Main activities of the SOCP include:-

1. Confiscation, quarantine, and reintroduction to the wild of illegal pet Sumatran orangutans
2. Research and monitoring of remaining wild Sumatran orangutan populations

3. Habitat protection and conservation

4. Conservation education and awareness raising

To date the SOCP as returned to the wild more than 190 illegal captive orangutans and rescued a number of orangutans in similar situations to Seuneam.

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