

Clear Labels, Not Forests – new Europe-wide campaign calls for palm oil to no longer be a hidden ingredient on food packaging

Today, a coalition of conservation organisations has launched a campaign to call for mandatory labelling of palm oil on food packaging in Europe. Rapid expansion of the palm oil industry is having disastrous consequences for critically endangered species, including the orangutan, Asian elephant, rhino and tiger. If introduced, this measure will ultimately lead to better forest protection in Southeast Asia and Africa. Palm oil is a hidden ingredient found in up to half of packaged food products across Europe.

A new directive on the “Provision of food information to consumers”, also known as the Sommer Report, is currently under review in the European Parliament. The “Clear Labels, Not Forests” campaign is calling for an urgent amendment to the Directive which would make it compulsory for palm oil to be labelled clearly on food packaging; it is currently usually listed as ‘vegetable oil’.

The coalition, including the Sumatran Orangutan Society, Orangutan Foundation, Elephant Family, Save the Rhino, The Jane Goodall Institute UK and Ape Alliance, urges people to write to MEPs on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety Parliamentary Committee and ask for palm oil to be labelled clearly.

Nessa Childers MEP, who tabled this amendment, said: “I strongly believe that consumers are entitled to complete information on the make-up of the food products they choose to consume. Equally, European consumers should be reasonably entitled to make a judgment as to what type of vegetable oil they consume based on a number of criteria, including the impact on the environment and habitats from which the oil has been sourced.”

Helen Buckland, UK Director of the Sumatran Orangutan Society said: “We do not advocate a boycott of products containing palm oil. We are supporting this campaign because we believe this new legislation could be a crucial tool in helping us to drive the demand from Europe for certified sustainable palm oil. If given the choice between a product that contains palm oil, and one that contains certified sustainable palm oil, European consumers will choose the latter. So it’s in companies’ best interests to clean up their supply chains and meet this demand. ”

Ashley Leiman OBE, Director of the Orangutan Foundation adds “Clearer labels will ensure that the consumer can be confident that they aren’t buying a product that is responsible for clearing globally important forest areas and the biodiversity contained therein.”

Mark Shand, founder of Elephant Family said: “The palm oil industry is having a devastating effect on many endangered species such as the Asian elephant, orangutan, rhino and tiger. This campaign will give much needed visibility to this hidden ingredient and will help to save vital forest habitat”

If the amendment is passed, companies will have up to three years to comply with the new legislation – ample time to source certified sustainable palm oil.

Members of the public can support the campaign through www.Call4.org

For more information, high resolution images, or to arrange an interview, call +44 (0)1865 403341 or email helen@orangutans-sos.org

Notes to editors:

The directive on the “Provision of food information to consumers”

Further information on the Directive (reference COD/2008/0028) is available from:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/FindByDocnum.do?lang=en&docnum=COM/2008/40>

About palm oil

Palm oil is a hidden ingredient found in up to half of packaged food products across Europe, including chocolate, biscuits, cereals, margarine, soup, crisps and ice cream. Usually listed simply as ‘vegetable oil’, consumers are currently unable to make informed decisions about the products they purchase not only on health grounds (due to its high saturated fat content) but also based on the palm oil industry’s well-documented negative environmental and social impacts.

Palm oil is the world’s most popular vegetable oil, primarily produced in Indonesia and Malaysia, and with rapid expansion now being seen in Africa. Its production is often at the expense of tropical forests and carbon-rich peatlands, hindering the global effort to reduce carbon emissions to prevent dangerous climate change. The rapid expansion of the industry into these areas is having disastrous consequences for a multitude of critically endangered species, including the orangutan, elephant, rhino and tiger, as well as local communities,

Coalition member organisations:

Sumatran Orangutan Society

The Sumatran Orangutan Society is dedicated to the conservation of Sumatran orangutans and their forest home. Together with a team of committed Indonesian conservationists, we work with local communities living alongside the last remaining orangutan habitat. We plant trees to restore damaged ecosystems and provide training to help the local people work towards a more sustainable future for their forests. www.orangutans-sos.org

Orangutan Foundation

Founded in 1990, the Orangutan Foundation's aim is to ensure the survival of orangutans and the biodiversity of its habitat through the protection of the tropical forests of Borneo and Sumatra. The Orangutan Foundation recognizes that orangutan habitat is unique in its richness of biodiversity and is crucial for local communities, who are as dependant on the forest as is the orangutan. www.orangutan.org.uk

Elephant Family

Elephant Family exists to save the endangered Asian elephant from extinction in the wild, along with tigers, orang-utans and all the other animals who share their habitat. Registered in 2002, they are a young yet hugely ambitious charity that has become the UK’s biggest funder of Asian elephant conservation. Massive habitat loss in the past 100 years has caused Asian elephant populations to plummet by 90%. This iconic animal is now on the IUCN red list, and without action could be extinct within 30 years. Elephant Family invests where they are needed most: to protect habitat, prevent conflict and reconnect the forest homes of the endangered Asian elephant.

In 2010 the charity made its mark on London by unleashing 260 brightly painted elephant sculptures on the capital’s streets, parks and landmarks as part of their memorable fundraising and awareness campaign, Elephant Parade London 2010.

www.elephantfamily.org

Save the Rhino

Save the Rhino International works to conserve viable populations of critically endangered rhinos in Africa and Asia. We recognise that the future of wildlife is inextricably linked to the communities that share its habitat. By funding field projects and through education, our goal is to deliver material, long-lasting and widespread benefits to rhinos and other endangered species, ecosystems and to the people living in these areas. www.savetherhino.org

The Jane Goodall institute

Founded by renowned primatologist Jane Goodall, the Jane Goodall Institute is a global organisation that empowers people to make a difference for all living things. Jane Goodall's Roots & Shoots groups work in over 1,000 UK schools inspiring action for people, animals and the environment. In Africa we help local people take charge of the conservation and development of their own communities, thus protecting chimpanzees and their habitats. www.janegoodall.org.uk

Ape Alliance

The Ape Alliance is an international coalition of organisations and individuals, working for the conservation and welfare of apes. With Friends of the Earth, the Palm Oil Working Group published 'The Oil for Ape Scandal' the first major report on this issue, available from www.foe.co.uk/resource/reports/oil_for_ape_full.pdf