

PRESS RELEASE

Adult male Sumatran Orangutan rescued from Tripa Peat Swamps in Sumatra and given Second Chance at Life in the Wild.

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From :

1. PanEco Foundation – Sumatran Orangutan Conservation Programme (YEL-SOCP)
2. Balai Konservasi Sumber Daya Alam (BKSDA) Aceh

[**Aceh, Indonesia**] On Thursday, 30th August 2018, a large isolated male Sumatran orangutan (*Pongo abelii*) was captured and evacuated by a team from the Sumatran Orangutan Conservation Programme (SOCP) and the Aceh Conservation Agency (BKSDA Aceh) of Indonesia's Ministry of Environment and Forestry, from a tiny fragment of forest surrounded by palm oil plantations in the Tripa peat swamps, part of the world renowned Leuser Ecosystem in Sumatra, Indonesia.

The orangutan, an adult male aged around 30 to 35 years old first had to be captured by the team, which included SOCP veterinarian drh. Pandu Wibisono and SOCP Operations Manager Asril, using an anaesthetic rifle, whilst he was high in one of the few trees still left standing in the area.

SOCP Operational Manager, Asril, commented, “We really don't like to capture wild orangutans, but in exceptional circumstances like these we feel we have no choice. With their habitat already taken away from them orangutans like “Salah” don't have a chance. With hardly any of their natural foods left in the area they are forced to steal farmers crops and even eat the oil palm seedlings themselves, since they have absolutely no other option in their fight to survive. Hence, they are often shot, or killed in some other brutal way for their trouble. And even if they don't get killed by people, they'll eventually die of malnutrition and starvation.”

After being successfully darted at around 08.30am, and then caught in a net as he fell the 10 metres or so from the branch he was clinging on to, SOCP vet drh. Pandu assessed his overall condition and health, concluding that he was in surprisingly good physical condition considering the environment he was living in, with a body weight of around 65kg. The rescue team then chose to name the large male orangutan, “M Salah”, since they were discussing the performance of

English football team Liverpool and Egypt's striker during this year's World Cup, after he had been successfully captured.

Drh. Pandu Wibisono, SOCP veterinarian, stated, "From the health checks we performed, we found "Salah" was in surprisingly good health and general condition, especially as he has been forced to live in such a barren environment since his habitat was destroyed. He was obviously stressed throughout the capture operation and the journey, which is to be expected since he has lived all his life as a wild orangutan."

On being pronounced healthy enough to be immediately released to a safer area of forest, "Salah" was then transported around 2.5 km across a landscape of dried out peatlands and newly planted oil palm seedlings, and eventually placed to recover from the anaesthetic on a thick mattress of coconut fibre, in a large transport cage. Inside his strange new accommodation he was then loaded on to the vehicle that would take him on the next stage of his journey, a 12-hour drive to the SOCP's orangutan reintroduction centre in the forests of the Jantho Nature Reserve, near the northern tip of Sumatra.

SOCP Director, Dr. Ian Singleton, who was leading the operation, explained, "I hate the fact that we have to do this kind of thing. That we have to evacuate orangutans like Salah is a clear sign that we are failing to protect the wild populations in their natural habitat. Fortunately, however, we are also reintroducing confiscated illegal pet orangutans back to the wild in Jantho, the aim being to establish an entirely new, genetically-viable and self-sustaining wild population of this Critically Endangered Species in the Nature Reserve there. So, whilst its extremely sad that that we have to rescue orangutans like him, the up side is that he is now joining over 100 orangutans already introduced into the new population we are gradually creating in Jantho, and he will probably live a long life in the wild there. What's more, if he's lucky and the females already there find him attractive, there's every chance he will father infants with some of them, thereby making a significant contribution to both the new population being established, and the overall survival prospects if his 'Critically Endangered species, something he would have had no chance of doing if we hadn't got him out of where he was." Ian stressed.

On arrival at the Jantho reintroduction centre at around 10pm that night Salah was left to recuperate from the day's ordeal in his cage, and was released to the forest nearby just after sunrise the next morning, in an area where several of the previously released orangutans were known to be around.

"He came out of the box like a rocket", reported Dr Singleton, "obviously stressed by his journey and terrified at being confined in a strange, and what to him was a completely 'alien' environment. He took one very quick and disdainful look over his shoulder at us, his captors, and rapidly climbed the nearest available tree to get away from us. He then stopped though, as he climbed higher and first noticed his new surroundings, seemingly amazed to see continuous

treetops in every direction. I was wondering what would be going through his head as he looked out over the canopy. After witnessing the forests of his birth being destroyed around him for much of his life, it must be a bit very weird suddenly finding yourself in a thriving and rich forest once again, and perhaps reminiscent of his childhood. A bit like me suddenly being transported to 1970's in the North of England!" he concluded.

Head of the Aceh Conservation Agency for Indonesia's Ministry of Environment and Forestry, Supto Aji Prabowo, added, "All orangutans are legally protected in Indonesia. It is a crime to capture, keep or kill them and several people have been successfully prosecuted in recent years. We hope these prosecutions will act as a deterrent to anyone thinking of capturing or killing an orangutan, and for anyone who is offered one as a pet", he emphasized.

Background :

- The Sumatran orangutan (*Pongo abelii*) is a distinct species from its neighbour in Borneo (*Pongo pygmaeus*). It is also different from the third, most recently described orangutan species, that was announced to the world only in November 2017, namely the Tapanuli orangutan (*Pongo tapanuliensis*), living in the Batang Toru Ecosystem of North Sumatra: <http://www.batangtoru.org/orangutan/>, further south in Sumatra than the Sumatran orangutan species
- Only around 13,400 Sumatran orangutans and less than 800 Tapanuli orangutans remain in the wild. All three orangutan species are listed as Critically Endangered by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in their Red List of Threatened Species.
- The Sumatran Orangutan Conservation Programme (www.sumatranorangutan.org) is a collaborative programme of the Swiss-based PanEco Foundation (www.paneco.ch), its partner NGO in Indonesia Yayasan Ekosistem Lestari (YEL: Sustainable Ecosystem Foundation; www.yel.or.id), and the Indonesian Ministry of Environment and Forestry's Directorate General of Natural Resource and Ecosystems Conservation (Ditjen KSDAE (<http://ksdae.menlhk.go.id>)).

The SOCP is active in all aspects of Sumatran orangutan conservation including :

1. Confiscation, rehabilitation, and reintroduction of captive orangutans to form new viable wild populations.

2. Research, surveys and monitoring of wild orangutan populations.
3. Habitat protection and restoration.
4. Environmental education and awareness raising.

Since 2001, the SOCP has received over 370 orangutans at its specialist orangutan quarantine centre near Medan, in North Sumatra. Over 170 of these have been released at the SOCP reintroduction centre in Jambi province, and 109 orangutans have now been reintroduced to the forests of Jantho Nature Reserve, in Aceh province, since 2011.

The **Tripa peat swamps** that M Salah was rescued from, and the **Leuser Ecosystem** in which they are located have both been in the news regularly during recent years. Tripa first came to the world's attention in 2012, when huge illegal fires ripped through several landscape scale oil palm plantations, destroying the forests and devastating local biodiversity, and releasing huge amounts of carbon into the atmosphere at the same time. These events led to several prosecutions against the companies by Indonesia's Ministry of Environment, resulting in large fines and prison terms being handed out to the offenders. Sadly, in 2018, the most significant of these fines (approx. USD 26 million to the palm oil company PT Kallista Alam, remains unpaid, and some of the jail terms unenforced, due to some more recent, highly dubious, court decisions still being challenged by the Ministry

Photos:

A selection of photos of M Salah's rescue and later release to wild are available for download at the following link. Credit for each should go to "Nanang Sujaya".

https://www.dropbox.com/home/RESCUE%20OU%20M%20SALAH_TRIPA

1. https://paneco.ch/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/7.-Tim-memeriksa-Orangutan_nanang-Sujana.jpg
2. <https://paneco.ch/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/4.-ORANGUTAN-M-SALAH-SETELAH-DI-BIUS.jpg>
3. https://paneco.ch/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/8.-Ilan-dan-Pandu-menandu-Orangutan_nang-Sujana.jpg
4. https://paneco.ch/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/6.-Orangutan-dibawa-dari-daerah-terisolir_SOCP.jpg
5. https://paneco.ch/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/9.-M-SALAH-dilepasliarkan_-Nanang-Sujana.jpg
6. <https://paneco.ch/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/3.-ORANGUTAN-M-SALAH.jpg>

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