



## From the President ...

**This year was – to say the least – very different. Our best laid plans for 2020, unfortunately, fell apart early in the year with COVID-19 spreading across the globe.**

The pandemic changed our focus in Indonesia instantly. We had to move from releasing orangutans to protecting the 442 orangutans under our care, as well as the 493 staff members who look after them.

To avoid any infection with SARS-CoV-2 and a possible “COVID-19 time bomb” in the rainforest and our care centres, we put an immediate hold on releases and closed all our facilities to the public. Furthermore, we deferred all volunteer programmes and asked all back-office staff to work from home.

In addition to applying stricter health protocols, we also changed our staff’s work roster and conducted rapid tests on personnel at both our rehabilitation centres.

We are now pleased to announce that our immediate actions were successful. As of writing in early

December, we have avoided COVID-19 infections in our care centres – both in orangutans and our staff. And it is only now that we are planning a gradual re-opening with strict protocols.

On a positive note, our global webinar ‘Hangout with Orangutans’ to celebrate this year’s International Orangutan Day was a full success. The whole BOS partner network was in action, live streaming on social media for 16-hours straight – an ambitious effort, that no organization we know of has ever attempted.

And we were delighted to have been awarded an Australian Ethical Community Grant. With the \$20,000, we can release four more orangutans back into the Bornean rainforest.

We can’t thank the Australian Ethical Foundation and, above all, you, our loyal donors, enough for your continuous support and generosity. Without you, we wouldn’t have made it through this unprecedented year. And we still need your help to continue to care for and feed the orangutans in our centres.

Please enjoy this last issue of 2020, in which we inform you about palm oil and how you can make the right choices when buying products. Learn about how orangutans communicate. And meet resilient Nobri, who reminds us, that we should never give up – even when times are as challenging as they are now.

We wish you a happy holiday season and assure you that with your help all of us at BOS will continue our efforts to protect orangutans and their habitat in 2021 and beyond.

Tony Gilding, President



## The gift of a second chance



**Recently we took in two orphan babies – 10-month-old Jeni and 9-month-old Alexander.**

Both were malnourished and very frightened, with Alexander weighing a tiny 3.5 kilograms and Jeni requiring urgent veterinary attention for a leg injury. Both babies were kept in quarantine before they were moved to the nursery centre, where they are thankfully now thriving.

However, orphaned orangutans are truly dependent on your support

in these crucial times. We urgently need your help to continue providing ongoing care to not only Jeni and Alexander but the many other orphans already at our centres and those that will arrive very soon.

We know it has been a tough year for all, but if you are in the position to help, please consider a **gift of \$30** this Christmas. You could also buy an Instant Gift from our website, which makes a wonderful Christmas present as well. Thank you so much!



## Palm oil – curse and blessing

**The single greatest threat facing orangutans today is habitat loss through deforestation. And the key driver for deforestation is the rapidly expanding palm oil industry.**

Some 10,000 of the critically endangered Bornean orangutans live in areas allocated to oil palms<sup>1</sup>. Every year, many of them are killed during human-orangutan conflicts. The remaining forest patches within the chopped-up oil palm landscapes are often not big enough to support orangutans. Therefore, the red apes have to move closer and closer towards human settlements to find food.

So, wouldn't it be best to boycott palm oil to save orangutans and their habitat? Unfortunately, it is not that easy. The subject is highly sensitive, and to find a solution requires looking at the problem from different perspectives.

Palm oil is not per se bad – if you put it in the right place, with the proper permit and produce it sustainably in compliance with the globally agreed environmental standards. The palm oil industry plays an important role in employment and economic growth in developing countries. Profits from the crop pay for infrastructure like schools and hospitals, and the jobs the plantations create help decrease poverty in rural areas.

To move away from palm oil will not just have an immense economic impact in those regions that benefit from it, but likely drive demand elsewhere for other vegetable oils, principally shifting the problem from one area to the next.

### Incredibly efficient

Let's look at why palm oil became so popular. The oil palm *Elaeis guineensis* is an incredibly efficient crop. It produces up to nine times more oil per unit area than other

equivalent oil crops like soy, sunflower and rapeseed.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, it requires less land, and it has the smallest footprint when it comes to energy, fertiliser and pesticides.

Palm oil has many positive aspects. It is odourless and colourless, semi-solid at room temperature, resistant to oxidation and stable even at high temperatures. It keeps spreads spreadable, lipsticks creamy, chips crispy, makes shampoos, soaps and detergents foam and prevents ice cream from melting too quickly.

Without it, 50 per cent of the products on our supermarkets' shelves would have to be reformulated. No wonder, the food industry uses the majority of it, about 70 per cent, either as vegetable oil or embedded in other ingredients. It occurs in personal care and cleaning products and is used as a cheap raw material for biofuels.

Today, Indonesia is the largest producer of this ubiquitous oil with about 14 million hectares of oil palms under cultivation – the equivalent of almost 14 million full-size rugby fields. Together with Malaysia, Indonesia produces about 85 per cent of the world's palm oil<sup>3</sup>. Smallholder farmers manage about 40 per cent of Indonesia's oil palm plantations area<sup>4</sup> and depend on growing the versatile crop for their livelihood.

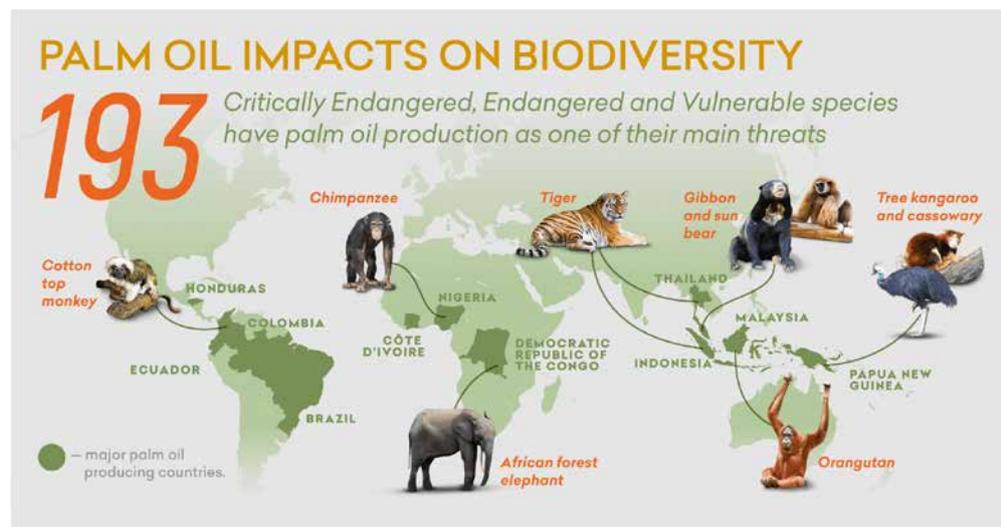
However, with the increasing global demand and more and more companies and governments sacrificing the environment for profits, the palm oil industry causes massive deforestation, biodiversity loss and greenhouse gas emissions. Oil palm plantations are responsible for at least 39 per cent of forest loss in Borneo between 2000 and 2018.<sup>5</sup> And nearly 150,000 orangutans vanished over a 16-year-period between 1999 and 2015, largely as a result of deforestation and killing<sup>6</sup>.

### Growing awareness

So, what can you do, to help the orangutans and their habitat? Obviously, you can buy products that are palm oil free. This can be quite challenging, as palm oil presents itself under all different kinds of names and abbreviations. To help you find the right products, we have prepared a list of palm oil free alternatives.

On the other hand, you can buy products that contain deforestation free palm oil. BOS Australia supports the use of 'Certified Sustainable Palm Oil' (CSPO). This oil comes from plantations that have been independently certified as meeting the standards of the 'Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil' (RSPO), which aims to transform markets to make sustainably sourced palm oil the norm.

Photo: © IUCN



Due to a growing awareness within the general public, almost 20 per cent of the globally produced palm oil is now CSPO. We at BOS believe that certified sustainable palm oil can be fully adopted in the market. Even though shifting to sustainable production and the RSPO certification process is not without issues; in our opinion, it is the most acceptable solution currently available.

Sadly, the labelling of palm oil is not compulsory in Australia and New Zealand. The food and cosmetic companies have fought a long battle to avoid compulsory labelling.

To improve the certification process, we are supporting organisations that work towards even better standards and policing of CSPO production. And we are aiming for

clearer labelling of products, so that you, the consumer, can easily distinguish between conventional and deforestation free palm oil. Although there is more work to be done, the RSPO and the demand for CSPO are critical first steps towards halting and reversing deforestation to protect the world's last intact rainforests and their inhabitants.

Please **download our 'Palm Oil Free & CSPO List'** and forward it to your family, friends and colleagues. Please also check out our **website** for more helpful information on palm oil. And if you find any product containing uncertified palm oil, please contact the manufacturers directly and ask why they are not using certified sustainable palm oil. Ask them to send you an email confirming their

comments. If it is not sustainably sourced, seek an alternative product and let the manufacturer know why you have chosen not to buy their product. Almost all food products sold in Australia have a contact telephone number on the packaging.

The more pressure we apply to retailers and manufacturers, the better the chance that they will eventually use certified sustainable palm oil in all their products – or even go palm oil free.

[1][2] IUCN, 2018

[3] Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), 2017

[4] World Resources Institute (WRI), 2018

[5] Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), 2019

[6] Voigt et al., 2018, Current Biology

## How orangutans 'talk'

**Great apes use diverse repertoires of vocal, gestural, and facial signals to communicate. Forest Chatter spoke with Andrea Knox, BOS Foundation's International Communications and Research Advisor, and one of the scientists from the University of Exeter, UK, who conducted the first in-depth study of gestures among wild orangutans.**

**What was the largest challenge involved with revealing the vocal, facial and gestural signals?**

The greatest challenge is in getting the data in the first place. Not only are orangutans the only great ape that does not live in social groups, but their lives in the trees frequently make filming impractical. The entire communication can be quite quick and nuanced. The gesture may have taken only two or three seconds, but it can take ten minutes just to understand what happened. That's why filming them is so important.

**Compared to zoo-based studies, you found several new aspects.**

Three of our gestures – swing of an appendage, stomp, and object in mouth – were not previously reported in any context. This is likely not due to a difference in the repertoire, but rather just a lack of studies.

In previous, captive orangutan studies, scientists found that orangutans were likely to move into their recipients' line

of vision before beginning to gesture. But for wild orangutans, we rarely observed them adjusting the position from which they signalled. Instead, they employed tactile gestures toward out-of-sight recipients.

**You identified 11 vocal and 21 physical gesture types. How does the orangutan language repertoire compare to that of other great apes?**

The knee-jerk reaction is to state that chimpanzees should have a larger gestural repertoire because they live in social groups, but this may not be correct. Orangutans still engage in semi-regular social events, like mating, males disputing territories or females clustering at times of high fruit availability. They may have even more gestures to facilitate the transmission of knowledge from mother to child, given the longer period of dependence for young orangutans. The only way forward is to do more research.

**Did you find any evidence that orangutans actually 'talk' to each other?**

We recorded over 20 exchanges where the recipient responded to the initial signal with another signal, and five exchanges where there were three parts, so, the initial signaller responded again to the recipient's signal. One of these was in the context of play, one occurred

while the mother-offspring pair were resting, another when a juvenile appeared to try to solicit food from his mother, and the remaining two both occurred when the mother appeared to be trying to make her offspring move with her.

**Was there any finding that surprised you?**

The versatility of orangutans. In chimpanzees, gestures are frequently broken down by limb, for example, arm swing and leg swing are categorised as different gestures. For orangutans, the data was more similar to a chimpanzee that had four arms. This makes perfect sense as their lives in the trees require a higher level of mobility and versatility. Orangutans have four limbs that are almost equally capable in any action, for example, grabbing, swinging, or even opening food. Imagine your mother telling you it was time to move as a child, but instead of tapping your shoulder with her fingers, she did it with her toes!



# HELLO, I AM NOBRI!



## My Background:

I was born on August 29, 2005. My mum Shelli was kept as an illicit pet in Jakarta before she arrived at the Nyaru Menteng rehabilitation centre.

She graduated from forest school in only two years and started living a semi-independent life on one of BOS Foundation's pre-release islands. There she became pregnant with me.

My mum was amazing. She raised me to be a completely independent orangutan in just five years, when, in 2010, she gave birth to my sister Forest.

Because I grew up naturally, I have excellent survival skills, and I don't like humans.

However, my fierce independence once worked against me when, in 2013, my mum, sister and I were selected as release candidates. I was so wary and quick that the vets couldn't tranquillize me, so, they

had no choice, but to free another orangutan.

## My First Release:

In 2016, the vets caught me off guard. While preparing candidates for the 12th release from Nyaru Menteng, they spotted and sedated me, and could finally release me.

I immediately proved myself as a highly skilled wild orangutan. I enjoy challenging the abilities of the Post-Release Monitoring team, by keeping high up in the trees, hiding from their vision, and erupting into a chorus of kiss-squeaks when they attempt to observe me.

Eventually, in November 2017, they were lucky enough to spot me and noticed some abnormal swelling near my armpits. Over the months, the swelling turned into large bumps, and my air sac started to balloon. I had air sacculitis, a painful and potentially deadly disease.

By late 2018, with my symptoms worsening, the vets had no choice but to sedate me and to move me into the camp, where I had to undergo numerous surgeries and a long oral medication regime.

## My Second Chance:

I fought hard, and in January 2019, I was strong enough to go back into the forest. Since then, I am playing hide and seek with the technicians again. Because they couldn't find me, they weren't aware of my pregnancy, and it was not until the beginning of 2020 that they spotted me with my baby. I think they were thrilled to discover not only the first wild-born child of 2020 but also another orangutan who was the second generation born from the BOSF rehabilitation program. Nearly twenty years after the rescue of my mum, her granddaughter was born free in the Bornean forest. How cool is that?!



**BOS Australia**  
primates helping primates

**Borneo Orangutan Survival Australia**

+ 61 2 9011 5455  
PO Box 3916  
Mosman NSW 2088

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**Thank you for your continued support.**



## We love hearing from you

We know you've been spreading the orangutan word, so why not tell us about what you're up to? Email [contact@orangutans.com.au](mailto:contact@orangutans.com.au) or post your photos online at [facebook.com/bosaustralia](https://www.facebook.com/bosaustralia) or [instagram/bosaustralia](https://www.instagram.com/bosaustralia)

## Can you help us?

Your donations provide food, shelter, protection, medicine and companionship for orangutans in our care. Visit [www.orangutans.com.au](http://www.orangutans.com.au) to help us help them.

Donations by cheque are payable to Borneo Orangutan Survival (BOS) Australia at PO Box 3916, Mosman NSW 2088.

Make a one-off or regular payment via direct debit or by credit card either online or by calling us on +61 2 9011 5455. We now accept **Paypal** donations too! See the link on the homepage of our website.

Save paper and the environment and opt-in to receive our e-letter via email at [contact@orangutans.com.au](mailto:contact@orangutans.com.au)