

# Forest Chatter

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## From the president ...

**It is my pleasure to warmly welcome you to our September edition of Forest Chatter and to express my heartfelt gratitude! Once again, we could count on you, our incredible supporters, when we needed you most.**

Thanks to your generous contributions, we have successfully reached our goal for our end-of-the-financial-year appeal. We can now move forward with constructing the urgently needed new hospital complex for the orangutans at our new Nyaru Menteng 2 Centre. This achievement would not have been possible without you!

As you can imagine, moving and constructing a whole Orangutan Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre is a mammoth undertaking. But with your continued support, we are making steady progress, and I am thrilled

to keep you updated about each milestone we accomplish.

Sadly, we also have some deeply heartbreaking news to share this time. Our beloved Fani passed away. Fani had been in our care since December 2006 after being rescued from a life in a circus. With her long, captivating hair and graceful presence, Fani was an emblem of hope and strength, and we will miss her dearly.

On the following pages, I invite you to learn more about our latest rescued babies and how you can help care for them by adopting an orangutan like Bumi as part of our Spring Adoption Appeal. Bumi recently made a huge step towards freedom.

Have you ever wondered how the behaviour of rehabilitated and wild orangutans differs, and how similar

orangutans are to humans? We have fascinating facts for you on page 3.

Finally, don't miss the interview with Becky Parsons, our excellent Orangutan Enrichment Volunteer Coordinator, who explains on page 4 why you should join her next season on one of our volunteer tours to Samboja Lestari, Borneo.

Please enjoy our September issue!

*K WELFORD*  
Kerin Welford



## A new chapter begins for Bumi

**After thriving in Forest School and mastering essential survival skills, Bumi is ready for his next big challenge – he recently moved to Bangamat Pre-Release Island.**

Together with his friend Monita, he is now honing his skills, sharpening his instincts and learning the rhythm of the wild on a forested island that closely mirrors his natural habitat.



Pre-release islands are like a forest university for orangutans who have successfully completed our unique Forest School Program. Bumi graduated with flying colours, ready for the next adventure in his life. After a short boat ride, the team slowly opened his transport cage and released him onto the island, where Bumi immediately began to explore, taking his first steps toward independence.

Bumi arrived at our Nyaru Menteng centre on 18 June 2016. He was in deplorable condition, weak and shivering, with a fresh wound on his belly button from his umbilical cord, indicating that he was less than two weeks old. The veterinarian prescribed a course of antibiotics to pre-

vent infection in the wound and aid the healing process. Still, poor Bumi was so incredibly weak that he could not even open his eyelids. We believe that he was violently separated from his mother shortly after his birth.

After spending nine years at our Nyaru Menteng Centre and receiving exceptional care from our dedicated babysitters and veterinarians, his recent progress is not just a transition; it is a significant milestone on his journey to freedom – preparing him for the day he will return to the wild, where he truly belongs.

Will you support Bumi as he takes his final steps to freedom? Please adopt him here.



## Five baby orangutans starting over

**Jenny, Momo, Nia, Esa and Indri were all rescued this year after enduring traumatic experiences. They are now safe in the care of BOS Foundation's experienced rehabilitation teams. While their stories are heartbreaking, they are also filled with hope and serve as a reminder that each one of us can truly make a difference—for example, by supporting our [Spring Adoption Appeal](#).**

One evening in March 2025, at 7:00 PM local time, our veterinarian Dr. Agnes Pratamiutami Sriningsih received a call from two unknown numbers. Upon answering, a resident of Samboja District informed her about the presence of two baby orangutans who appeared to be in poor and emaciated condition.

According to the report, one of the two orangutan infants had suffered injuries from a dog bite. Our veterinarian immediately reported the information to the East Kalimantan Natural Resources Conservation Agency (BKSDA) to initiate a rescue mission. A unit of the BKSDA Wildlife Rescue team, including three members from the BOS Foundation, was dispatched to the scene and arrived at around 8:00 PM local time.

Upon arrival, the area was bustling with residents. The team swiftly

collected more detailed information and learned that the two female infants had been named Esa and Indri. A man had discovered Esa in a plantation, while his friend found Indri after his dog had attacked her.

Before being brought to Samboja District, locals kept the two orangutans as pets for a month. During that time, they fed them only sugar water and occasionally cassava leaf tips and treated Indri's wounds with an antiseptic. Fortunately, the medical examination revealed no signs of rabies infection. Realising that the infants needed better care, the residents decided to take Esa and Indri to Samboja, which involved a 12-hour motorbike ride.

While 6.5-month-old Esa showed signs of malnutrition and appeared thin, Indri, estimated to be 7.5 months old, was in a more alarming condition. She was even thinner, had numerous healing wounds, and one large open wound on her right temple. Her right wrist also appeared unable to straighten, likely due to trauma. Now, safe and sound at the Samboja Lestari Orangutan Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre, they receive 24/7 care in the Nursery Babies unit.

Just two months earlier, after a similar mission, Jenny had arrived at Samboja Lestari. She had also been kept as a pet for five months before the East Kalimantan BKSDA successfully rescued the one-year-old female orangutan from captivity. And today? Jenny is thriving in Forest School. She is mastering climbing and enjoying enrichment activities together with her new best friends – Esa and Indri.

Over at our Nyaru Menteng Centre in Central Kalimantan, Nia and Momo had a rough start, too. Nia is just 10 months old. She was rescued from a remote village after losing her mother to human-wildlife conflict and being kept as a pet. When she arrived, she was tiny – just 3 kilograms – and had abrasions on her back from being tied up during her time in captivity.

And then there is Momo, a 1.5-year-old female. The local who had found Momo kept her confined in a cramped wooden chicken cage behind his house for six months while searching for the proper wildlife authorities. When she arrived at Nyaru Menteng, her right toe was broken – a painful mark of her struggle to survive.

The good news is that Nia's and Momo's condition is steadily improving. Even more encouraging is their growing instinct to climb. Every morning, they are up in the trees, swinging about with thriving confidence. These promising signs are crucial for their rehabilitation and eventual return to the forest.

However, despite the flying start, the journey to freedom for the five orphans will be long and challenging. They will spend approximately five to six years in Forest School, followed by additional time on a pre-release island. This is why the support from our donors is so vital for these orangutan babies.

The most effective way to rewrite their stories is by supporting our [Spring Adoption Appeal](#) right now. By doing so, you help cover medical care, food, shelter, our unique Forest School program, and the dedicated human surrogate mothers who provide the love, protection and encouragement that our babies so desperately need.

"Every dollar donated helps us provide critical care for orphans like Jenny, Momo, Nia, Esa, and Indri," says BOS Australia CEO Kerin Welford. "Without public support, we simply couldn't do this work. Adoptions are a powerful way to be part of the solution and ensure these incredible animals have a future."

**Please support our [Spring Adoption Appeal](#) and sponsor one of our orphans. Our goal is to achieve at least 100 new adoptions by 15 October 2025.**





# Wild versus rehabilitated

**Not all orangutan behaviours are the same. One significant difference lies between wild and rehabilitated orangutans. Although they belong to the same species, their different life experiences play a major role in shaping their behaviour.**

A key distinction is that rehabilitated orangutans tend to have a greater tolerance for humans. This trait develops because rehabilitated orangutans are used to interacting with humans from an early age, whether during rescue operations, medical treatment, or daily care at rehabilitation centres.

In addition, those born in rehabilitation centres require more time and specific training to develop proper foraging behaviours. In contrast, wild orangutans generally possess more extensive and instinctual knowledge of natural food sources in the forest.

Another notable difference lies in their ability to build nests. Wild orangutans learn this skill directly from their mothers. Rehabilitated orangutans, however, often struggle with nest-building at first. They must learn by observation during their time in Forest School. This learning experience also shapes their social behaviour: Naturally semi-solitary animals, rehabilitated orangutans often exhibit higher levels of social interaction.

While wild-born orangutans acquire survival skills directly from their mothers in their natural habitat, orangutans born in rehabilitation centres grow up in a human-modified environment. As a result, they lack early-life experiences that reflect the complexity of wild living. Therefore, they develop their behaviour through structured learning processes rather than instinct or maternal rearing.

Nevertheless, orangutans raised in rehabilitation centres and those



brought up in the wild show relatively equal survival capabilities. One example is Lesan (photo), who BOS released in 2012. She has survived in the wild to this day and given birth to two offspring, whom she successfully taught to survive in the forest.

Understanding the behavioural differences is crucial for designing effective release and post-release monitoring programs. This knowledge also helps conservation teams tailor training stages to ensure that orangutans are truly ready to survive in the wild.

As a testament to the success of our rehabilitation program, BOS has successfully released 549 orangutans to date. From these releases, we have recorded 36 wild births.

## How similar are orangutans to humans?

**With up to 97% DNA similarity, it is not surprising that the behaviour and intelligence of orangutans often display remarkably human-like traits. Let's explore 10 fascinating facts that highlight the similarities between orangutans and humans.**

**1 Orangutans have "culture"**  
Scientists have documented that orangutans have culture, behaviours that are learned and passed down from generation to generation. These include techniques for nest building, using tools, and even using leaves as umbrellas. These cultural traits vary depending on the population and the region where they live, much like human cultural diversity.

**2 Intelligence on par with chimpanzees**  
Orangutans rank high on the primate intelligence spectrum – on par with chimpanzees and even higher than gorillas. They can understand cause and effect, make plans, and use basic logic.

**3 Orangutans use tools – just like humans**  
In the wild, orangutans use

sticks to extract honey, open spiky fruits, or retrieve insects from tree bark. These problem-solving skills reflect the ingenuity of early humans.

**4 They learn by observing and imitating**  
Orangutans are visual learners. They watch and imitate the behaviour of their mothers or other orangutans they perceive as "experts."

**5 Orangutans are semi-solitary primates**  
Unlike gorillas, which live in groups, orangutans are considered semi-solitary. However, they still form complex social relationships, especially during certain periods like fruiting seasons or while raising offspring.

**6 They show empathy and a desire to comfort others**  
Orangutans try to comfort friends who are injured or lonely with hugs or gentle physical contact. This behaviour reflects their high level of emotional sensitivity.

**7 A long childhood – just like human children**  
Young orangutans stay with their mothers for 7 to 8 years to learn vital survival skills. This is the longest

period of dependency among mammals, aside from humans.

**8 Orangutans have unique personalities**  
Like humans, each orangutan has its own personality. Some are shy, others bold; some are social, while others prefer solitude. This individuality reflects emotional complexity and distinct personal traits.

**9 Communicate through complex vocalisations and gestures**  
Orangutans use a wide variety of vocalisations, including long calls, hand gestures, facial expressions and body movements to convey specific intentions. This forms an intricate and effective non-verbal communication system.

**10 Highly adaptive to environmental changes**  
Orangutans are incredibly adaptable to changes in food availability. They can eat more than 300 types of food in the wild, including fruits, leaves, bark and insects. They are also able to recognise when and where specific trees will bear fruit.

# HELLO, I AM REBECCA PARSONS

Becky is BOS Australia's Enrichment Volunteer Coordinator. We caught up with her before she heads back to Borneo for the upcoming season.

## How did you get involved with BOS and orangutan conservation?

I've always been deeply passionate about conservation, but it all began with my geography teacher. I was completely in awe of his classes, learning about the incredible rainforests, and I couldn't wait to see them for myself. I first volunteered in the Belizean rainforest, and my love for the jungle later led me to Central Borneo. There, an orangutan grabbed my ankle, taking my breath away, and in that moment, I felt an instant and deep connection with them. The global pandemic gave me the push to finally leave my corporate job and follow my heart into conservation. I've now been volunteering with BOS Australia for 3 years, and last year, I took on the position of Enrichment Volunteer Coordinator.

## Can you share a personal highlight from your first season in Borneo?

My highlight was meeting one of our unreleasable orangutans, Jeje. He is about 14 years old and was sadly kept illegally as a pet before being rescued by the BOS Foundation. Due to his condition – Orangutan Respiratory Disease Syndrome – he cannot be released back into the wild. Every day when the volunteers arrived to deliver enrichment, Jeje would swing down from the top of his enclosure to greet us. He was always very shy and never made eye contact, but by



the end of my five-month stay, he felt comfortable enough to look at me. That experience was truly magical.

## What makes the Enrichment Volunteer Program so special for participants?

There are only a few places on this planet where you can see orangutans every day and work so closely with them. Volunteers get to experience how each individual has their distinct personality – from cheeky Keke with her naughty streak to Bujang, with his striking “blonde” coat, reigning over his sanctuary island. On top of that, Samboja Lodge offers a unique volunteer accommodation experience. It features amazing rooms with hot water, lovely staff, delicious food, and is surrounded by the lushest rainforest. Nothing beats watching the sunrise from its rooftop while macaques play in the trees below.

## What does a typical day for a volunteer look like?

Every day is different - and nothing ever quite goes to plan in Indonesia! After breakfast, the day might start by making enrichment for the sun

bears and watching them work out how to get to the tasty hidden treats. Depending on the sanctuary's needs, volunteers may spend a few hours painting a cage or planting trees. We break for a yummy Indonesian lunch, followed by the best mango you'll ever taste. In the afternoon, volunteers usually collect browse (branches and leaves) to give to our unreleasable orangutans to make their nests. And then it's time to make more enrichment for the orangutans, before we head back to the lodge for a refreshing shower.

## What impact did the volunteers have last season?

In addition to creating numerous daily enrichment items for the orangutans and sun bears, our volunteers painted the sun bears' cage attached to their training enclosure, built three wooden platforms on the orangutan sanctuary islands, and planted 261 trees. None of this would have been possible without them, and I am deeply grateful for all their hard work and dedication.

## If I were hesitant to go, what would you say to convince me to join?

I've had volunteers from all walks of life and of all ages, so don't let the unknown hold you back. Those who have stepped the furthest out of their comfort zone often gain the most from their time in Borneo. You won't regret it!

**Join us** in the next season! We offer multiple start dates from October 2025 to March 2026.



**BOS Australia**  
primates helping primates

**Borneo Orangutan Survival Australia**

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Our newsletter is proudly written and produced by BOS Australia volunteers.

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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://facebook.com/bosaustralia) or [instagram.com/bosaustralia](https://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 7699, Bondi Beach NSW 2026.

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 also accept **Paypal** donations. See the link on the homepage of our website.

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