

Palm oil demand puts orangutans at risk

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The growing demand for bio-diesel fuel threatens the survival of the orangutans of Borneo, the largest surviving population of the primate in the wild.

Lone Nielsen, head of Borneo Orangutan Survival, said as more forest is converted to palm plantations for palm oil the primates lose their habitat and, in many cases, are beaten by workers. A rehabilitation center run by the group is caring for 600 orangutans, most of them young orphans.

"There are broken bones, cracked skulls, burns, internal injuries," Nielsen said. "The plantation workers beat them because they want to catch them and the only way you can catch an orangutan is to knock it unconscious."

In 2003, the Indonesian government announced plans to make the country the world's largest producer of palm oil, which is essential for bio-diesel. A plan released the next year called for conversion of 40,000 square miles of Borneo to plantations by the end of the decade.

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