

Palm oil putting orangutans at risk

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Conservationists meeting at the Brookfield Zoo near Chicago say growing demand for palm oil is putting Sumatran orangutans at risk of extinction.

Keynote speaker Serge Wich, an orangutan researcher from Sumatra, said forests are being ruthlessly clear-cut in Indonesia to feed the exploding palm oil market, the Chicago Sun-Times reported Friday.

The large tree-dwelling mammals have lost about 80 percent of their habitat in the last 20 years and are currently found only on the islands of Borneo and Sumatra, the newspaper said. Ian Singleton of the Sumatran Orangutan Conservation Program estimated there are only about 6,700 orangutans left in Sumatra and 55,000 in Borneo.

Rather than call for a boycott of palm oil, the experts who met this week promoted firms that use the oil produced on environmentally sensitive plantations, the newspaper said.

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