

Illegal trade devastates Sumatran orangutan population, report says

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Lack of law enforcement against illegal trade in Indonesia threatens the survival of orangutans and gibbons on Sumatra, a new study by the wildlife trade monitoring network TRAFFIC shows.

Despite considerable investment in [wildlife](#) conservation, numbers of the critically endangered [orangutans](#) captured mainly for the pet trade exceeded the levels of the 1970s. A lack of adequate law enforcement is to blame, TRAFFIC says. TRAFFIC is a joint program between WWF and IUCN.

Records of orangutans and [gibbons](#) put into rehabilitation centers serve as an indicator of how many of these animals were illegally held. Meanwhile numbers continue to decline in the wild, with the most recent estimate of just 7,300 Sumatran Orangutans surviving.

Orangutans, which can weigh up to around 200 pounds and reach five feet in length, end up in such centers after they become too old and big to be held as pets. But owners of the reddish-brown colored [apes](#) do not face any legal consequences.

"It is futile to confiscate these animals without prosecuting the owners," said Crawford Allan, Director of TRAFFIC North America.

"There is just nothing to deter people from committing these crimes if they are not punished," Allan added. The laws are in place in Indonesia, but unless they are upheld the illegal trade will continue and the species

will spiral toward extinction."

An estimated 2,000 orangutans have been confiscated or turned in by private owners in Indonesia in the last three decades but no more than a handful of people have ever been successfully prosecuted.

Between 2002 and 2008, for example, the newly opened Sibolangit rehabilitation centre in Sumatra took in 142 Sumatran orangutans, while its predecessor, Bohorok rehabilitation centre accepted just 30 animals between 1995 (when it closed), and 105 orangutans between 1973.

"When the first rehabilitation centers were established for orangutans and later for gibbons it was hoped that with more apes being confiscated, levels of illegal trade would fall," said Vincent Nijman, a TRAFFIC consultant and author of the report, based at Oxford Brookes University.

"But with hundreds of orangutans and gibbons present in such centers, and dozens added every year, it is hard to view these numbers as anything other than an indictment against Indonesia's [law enforcement](#) efforts," he said.

The report also documents the 148 Sumatran gibbons and siamangs and 26 Sumatran orangutans kept in Indonesian zoos.

"Tackling this crisis requires investigating the root causes of trade and stricter enforcement of laws for the protection of orangutans, gibbons and the island's other wildlife," said Ginny Ng, WWF Program Officer for Borneo and Sumatra.

Sumatra's wildlife is also threatened by habitat loss due to deforestation, logging, land conversion, encroachment, and forest fires.

WWF is working to reduce the destruction of wildlife habitat in Sumatra

by working with industry to ensure High Conservation Value Forests are not converted for agriculture, empowering local communities to manage natural resources in a sustainable way, and providing alternatives.

Source: World Wildlife Fund

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