

Illegal orangutan trader prosecuted

February 23 2012



This is "Julius," a baby orangutan saved from an illegal trader in North Sumatra, Indonesia. He is expected to be released back into the wild in the near future.
Credit: WCS

The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and the Sumatran Orangutan Conservation Programme (SOCP) announced today Sumatra's first ever successful sentence of an illegal orangutan owner and trader in Medan, North Sumatra, Indonesia.

The seven-month prison sentence is only the third for Indonesia, despite [orangutans](#) being strictly protected under Indonesian law since 1924.

Although there have been over 2,500 confiscations of illegally held orangutans in Indonesia since the early 1970's, the first actual prosecution of an illegal orangutan owner occurred in Borneo in 2010, and now in Sumatra with this case in 2012.

The case began with the confiscation of a young male orangutan named Julius last July in Mardinding, Karo District, in the province of North Sumatra. The owner was allegedly trying to sell the orangutan, which was believed to be three years old.

The raid was conducted by the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry's Directorate-General for Forest Protection and Nature Conservation (PHKA), working in conjunction with WCS's [Wildlife Crime Unit](#) and the veterinarian and staff of the SOCP.

The Wildlife Crime Unit, created by WCS in 2003 and funded by the U.S. [Fish and Wildlife Service](#) and other donors, provides data and technical advice to [law enforcement agencies](#) to support the investigation and prosecution of wildlife crimes.

The SOCP, implemented by the Swiss-based PanEco Foundation, and the Indonesian NGO YEL (Foundation for a Sustainable Ecosystem) have operated the only orangutan rescue center in Sumatra since 2001 and have so far reintroduced over 150 confiscated ex-pet orangutans back to the wild. Julius is now being cared for at the SOCP's orangutan quarantine center near Medan, with just over 50 other orangutans also being prepared for a return to the forest.

After spending 30 days in quarantine, Julius is now living in a socialization cage, which allows him to adapt to the presence of other orangutans. Though the road to full rehabilitation might still be a long one, Julius is making excellent progress and is expected to be released back into the wild in the future.

The sentence reflects an increase in activity and action to combat the illegal [wildlife trade](#) in Indonesia in recent years. In the last two years there have been more than 20 arrests for illegally possessing or trading protected wildlife, including the critically endangered Sumatran tiger

and pangolin.

The prosecution is in full compliance with the Indonesian Government's own National Orangutan Conservation Strategy and Action plan, launched in 2007.

The majority of illegal pet orangutans are a byproduct of forest clearance for palm oil plantations and of conflicts between farmers and orangutans that raid crops in converted agricultural areas. In most cases, they are not hunted specifically for food or trade in Sumatra, but are more "refugees" from forests that no longer exist.

Conservationists believe Julius's mother was killed at the time of his capture. Relatively few orangutans are actively traded in Sumatra, but the SOCP and PHKA still confiscate around 30 illegal pets each year, whose mothers have been killed.

The Head of Natural Resources Conservancy Agency (BBKSDA) North Sumatra, Arief Tongkagie, said: "Based on the successful completion of this case, our hope is that in the future more people will be willing to report crimes against orangutans".

According to Panut, Chairman of the Sumatran Orangutan Conservation Forum (FOKUS): "Increased efforts to curb crimes against orangutans will provide a deterrent effect to traders."

The [Wildlife Conservation Society](#) is actively trying to reduce the damaging impact of the illegal wildlife trade.

"We commend Indonesia's Ministry of Forestry's Directorate-General for Forest Protection and Nature Conservation (PHKA) for taking a hard stance on wildlife trade, which is threatening to destroy the country's natural resources," said Dr Noviar Andayani, Director of the WCS

Indonesia Program. "We are hopeful that this prosecution sends a clear message that illegal wildlife trade will not be tolerated in Indonesia."

Live orangutans sold in Indonesia, or exported illegally to neighboring countries, are kept as pets or in private collections. Other wildlife traded for food, medicines, skins, biomedical research, souvenirs and pets from Indonesia include rhinos, elephants, tigers, birds, bears, orchids, marine and freshwater fish, turtles, fragrant timber, pangolins, corals, snakes, bats, sharks, and rodents.

"Working closely with law enforcement is a key component in the fight against illegal wildlife trade," said Joe Walston, WCS Executive Director for Asia programs. "If governments want to protect their wildlife resources, they need to be serious about enforcement. Clearly Indonesia is taking a lead on this front."

Ian Singleton, Director of Conservation for the PanEco Foundation and the person in charge of the SOCP, said: "It's absolutely fantastic to finally have a prosecution of an illegal orangutan 'owner' in Sumatra, but it's also long overdue. With this sentence, as long as it is widely publicized in the region, anyone considering capturing, killing or keeping an orangutan illegally will certainly think twice about it, and hopefully the numbers being killed and kept in the coming years will begin to decline."

Provided by Wildlife Conservation Society

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