

# Orphan orangutans return to the wild

November 21 2013, by Lesley Parker

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A rescued orphan orangutan. Credit: The Orangutan Project.

Asked what is so engaging about orangutans, Robyn Johns says it's simple: "When you watch their mannerisms and look into their eyes it's not surprising to learn that we have 97 per cent of our DNA in common."

In Malay and Indonesian orang means 'person' and utan is derived from hutan, which means 'forest', so orangutan literally means 'person of the forest', says Johns, a management lecturer at the University of

Technology, Sydney (UTS).

Johns got up close to these fellow mammals on a recent expedition to Sumatra with [The Orangutan Project](#) (TOP).

The project supports orphan [orangutans](#) that are eventually released back into the wild. Sumatran orangutans are listed as critically endangered because of poaching and encroachment of palm oil and paper plantations into their habitat.

Johns was one of the first guests allowed into TOP's research facility in Bukit Tigapuluh National Park, in eastern Sumatra, although the organisation also offers fundraising "adventure tours" of other parts of its operations.

Her trip came about after she met TOP president and founder Leif Cocks.

"We happened to be sitting next to each other at a dinner and started discussing the impact of business on local community and society at large," says Johns, who is Director of Undergraduate Programs in the Management Discipline Group at UTS Business School.

"He suggested I come and see firsthand the impact big business is having on the natural habitat of the orangutan in Sumatra."

While there, Johns and other guests helped researchers locate and monitor orangutans that had been reintroduced to the wild.

"I have seen many orangutans in the zoo but being up close to one in the wild is a completely different experience – it was absolutely breathtaking," Johns says.

"In the week I was there I got to see not only the amazing work TOP is doing to save the orangutan species but also their community development programs. These programs are designed to provide local employment that complements the conservation of biodiversity in the [national park](#).

Provided by University of Technology, Sydney

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