

Testing times: Borneo orangutans get COVID swabs

September 13 2021



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Dozens of critically endangered orangutans in Malaysia have been tested for the coronavirus, with vets in protective suits undertaking the tricky

task of giving the apes nasal swabs.

The [antigen tests](#) on 30 of the red-haired creatures in Sabah state on Borneo island were conducted last Tuesday, and all came back negative, [wildlife officials](#) said.

They were the first virus tests on orangutans in the Southeast Asian country, and were ordered after staff at a rehabilitation centre and [wildlife park](#) became infected.

"Testing for COVID-19 has been a vital tool in helping us get through this pandemic, and it is similarly important for this orangutan population," said Sen Nathan, assistant director of the Sabah Wildlife Department.

"The disease could prove vastly detrimental to their health and set back their rehabilitation."

Vets will continue to closely monitor the apes and tests will be conducted regularly, officials said.

Animals have become infected with COVID-19 on occasion. At the weekend, a zoo in Atlanta announced that several of its gorillas had tested positive. Domestic cats, dogs and at least one ferret have also been infected.

Malaysia is fighting a serious COVID-19 outbreak driven by the highly contagious Delta variant, and has been recording thousands of cases and hundreds of deaths each day.



Wildlife officials said antigen tests on all 30 of the red-haired creatures in Sabah state came back negative.

Sabah, on the northeastern tip of Borneo and home to vast tracts of jungle and a kaleidoscope of rare animals, has also faced a surge in cases.

Bornean orangutans are classified as "critically endangered" by protection group the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

Their populations have declined by more than 50 percent over the past 60 years, according to the WWF, as the animals' [forest habitat](#) has been progressively cut down to make way for agricultural plantations.

Borneo is shared between Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei.

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Citation: Testing times: Borneo orangutans get COVID swabs (2021, September 13) retrieved 12 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-09-borneo-orangutans-covid-swabs.html>

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