

# Orangutan release may begin next year

6 December 2006

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The first 90 of more than 1,000 orangutans are to be released in early 2007 in two areas of Borneo as part of a project to save the species.

Conservationists have identified two valleys as big enough to support the 1,150 orangutans, once common across Southeast Asia, but now only found on Sumatra and Borneo. Conservationists of the Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation said they are confident that they can secure enough money to begin returning the rescued animals to the wild, the Times of London said.

Illegal logging, mining and the expansion of palm oil crops have caused the decline in the number of endangered orangutans, one of the most rapidly declining species in the world. Conservationists estimated 4,000 to 5,000 orangutans are killed or made homeless.

The valleys are protected by law and are big enough to provide food and shelter for 1,150 apes, making it "ideal for the orangutan," said Michelle Desilets, of the survival foundation.

She told the Times people in five villages will "will keep an eye on the orangutans and support them. In return for their help, the villagers will get buildings for medical care and schooling.

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