

Conservation Corner

Palm Oil & Wildlife

Palm oil is a vegetable oil widely used in a variety of products including processed foods, cleaners and health and beauty products. When produced unsustainably, the production of palm oil destroys tropical habitats and displaces the animals that depend on them.

According to the conservation group Orangutan Outreach, it could be fewer than 10 years before orangutans have completely vanished from the wild. The single greatest threat facing orangutans is habitat loss, largely driven by logging and the conversion of forests into oil palm plantations. Ninety percent of the world's palm oil is produced on the only two islands where orangutans live. When Bornean and Sumatran orangutans lose habitat, they also become easy targets for hunters, who often capture young orangutans for the illegal pet trade. Today, more than half of all orangutans live outside of protected areas, in forests managed by timber, palm oil and mining companies.

The tropical rain forests are important not just to the animals that live there but to everyone on the planet. Tropical rain forests:

- Produce 40% of the world's oxygen;
- Absorb and store in the trees and soil a large amount of carbon from the air, which is necessary to maintain the planet's climate and prevent global warming;
- Regulate water cycles and rainfall patterns for the whole world, preventing flooding and landslides and ensuring there is enough rain to grow crops;
- Grow 70% of the anti-cancer plants from which medications are derived.

Despite these important functions, tropical rain forests are quickly disappearing. But, it's not too late to make a difference.

Take Action In the Classroom

Write thank you notes to companies (e.g. Starbucks, Loreal, General Mills, and Kraft) that are taking steps to ensure palm oil production doesn't lead to more deforestation. This is a great way to encourage companies to do the right thing for wildlife *and* address language literacy standards in the classroom.

Thank you letters should be mailed to the Oregon Zoo, Attn: Alison Heimowitz, 4001 SW Canyon Road, Portland, Oregon 97221. We will collect all the letters from this project and present them to let each of the companies know that so many people care about protecting habitat for wildlife.

When we try to pick out anything by itself,
we find it hitched to everything else in the universe. John Muir



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Small Actions

To learn more about how people can help protect orangutans and other threatened wildlife visit Small Actions, an easy-to-use online tool launched by the Oregon Zoo this fall that empowers everyone to become a wildlife defender: www.oregonzoo.org/converse/small-actions/orangutans.

Other Classroom Activities

1. Introduce students to the life of an orangutan through one of the following books:
 - Mang – The Wild Orangutan by Joan and John van Loon
(appropriate for 2nd – 4th grade students)
 - Tears in the Jungle – a Children’s Adventure to Save the Orangutan by Daniel Clarke, William Clarke, Maria Greenwood, Fiona Mitchell, Rodney Clarke
(appropriate for upper elementary)
2. Let your taste buds go wild and explore some of the yummy fruits (rambutan, jack fruit, durian, mango, mangosteen, fig, and snake fruit) that make up an orangutan’s diet. Discuss the interdependent relationship between orangutans and these fruits that helps keep our rainforests healthy. Orangutans eat a lot of different types of fruit and drop seeds on the forest floor in their dung (scat). The seeds germinate and take root growing into young saplings. The orangutan’s scat acts like fertilizer. Over time the young saplings grow into big trees in the spot where the animal dropped the seed. The trees produce fruit, attracting orangutans and other animals, which also eat the fruit, and the cycle starts again. Without each other, neither could survive!
3. Have your students imagine what it would be like to live as an orangutan in a rainforest and write a story about it.
4. Ask your students to find 2 items in their homes that contain palm oil and bring them to school or log them in their homework packets. Discuss the items in your classroom, and how pervasive palm oil is.
5. Take a field trip to the Oregon Zoo. Registration information can be found at www.oregonzoo.org/discover/field-trips-and-school-programs