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MAMMALS (THE ORANGUTAN)

Our country is rich with flora and fauna. They are all part of the ecosystem that makes Malaysia one of the most biologically diverse countries in the world. In this series, we will get to know some of the wildlife that live in our forests. The first species is an iconic one, the orangutan.



Orangutans or 'man of the forest' are the largest arboreal mammals in the world. It means that they are the largest mammals that have the capability to live in the tree canopy. The orangutans are the only great ape species (other than humans) that exists outside of Africa. The 3 great apes that are found in Africa are gorillas, chimpanzees and bonobos.

There are 3 species of orangutans: Sumatran, Bornean and Tapanuli. The Sumatran and Tapanuli orangutans are found on the island of Sumatra, Indonesia. The species of orangutans that are found in Malaysia is the Bornean orangutan. They live in the

jungles of Sarawak and Sabah. Besides these 2 states, Bornean orangutans are also found in Kalimantan, the Indonesian part of Borneo.

Physically, orangutans can be easily recognised by their dark-brown or reddish-orange hair. They have proportionally longer arms that help them move from one branch to another in the forest canopy. They have four long fingers but a shorter opposable thumb that helps them grip tightly on branches as they travel high in the trees. Big male orangutans are nearly twice the size of females. Adult males orangutans weigh between 50 to 90 kg and can stand between 1.25 to 1.5 meters in height. They can be recognized by their large cheek flaps that show their dominance over other individuals. Adult females weigh



kg and have an average height around 115 centimeters. An orangutan's diet mostly consists of fruits. During low fruiting periods, orangutans can survive on leaves, shoots, bird eggs, insects and also small vertebrates. One of the orangutan's favorite



fruits is durian. They can open the durian fruit with their strong hands and jaw. They spend most of their days foraging for food in between travelling and resting. The lifespan of orangutans in the wild is around 35 to 40 years.

Another unique characteristic of orangutans that differentiates them from other great apes is the fact that they live a semi-solitary life. All other great apes which include gorillas, chimpanzees and bonobos live in a group where they look

after each other and move about together. Meanwhile, an orangutan's social bond is often seen among adult females with offsprings. They can be seen feeding on the same tree with their babies as well as playing and interacting with them. Orangutan babies are highly dependent on their mothers for survival. They learn survival skills from their mother for about seven to eight years before they are fully dependent and move away from their mother. Male orangutans play no role in the caring of the young.

Orangutans are known for their intelligence and ability in using tools. They are known to use big leaves as umbrellas to protect themselves from getting wet during heavy rain. Using their nest building skills that they acquire from their mothers, orangutans



build nests every time they want to rest during the day or night. The nests are constructed by pulling and bending branches together under them until it is strong enough to take their weight. Without the ability to see in the dark, orangutans will sleep in their nests during the night before they start moving again during the sunrise.

Despite their uniqueness and intelligence, all 3 species of orangutans are now critically endangered. What this means is that their number and population size is declining every year. This is caused by deforestation, forest fires, hunting and illegal

pet trade. Many of their habitats have been converted into agricultural land and palm oil plantations. In the Lower Kinabatangan, the number of orangutans has fallen to less than 800 individuals. The destruction of their habitats has also pushed orangutans closer to human settlement and villages. Hunger might push them to raid agricultural areas for food crops, ending in human-wildlife conflict. Some of these orangutans are rescued and brought to wildlife and rehabilitation centers.



We need to continue to protect our forest to stop orangutans from going extinct. You can support several organizations who are actively working to rescue, rehabilitate and reintroduce orangutans to the wild. We can also plant more trees to reforest orangutan habitats that have been disturbed by human activities. You can learn more about orangutans through reading or watching nature documentaries. By working together, we can save the orangutans from extinction and protect our country's biodiversity and unique ecosystem.