

Orangutan (*Pongo pygmaeus*)

By Maya Lynch

Orangutans aren't popular, yet people still know they exist, thanks to zoos and Disney's "The Jungle Book." But Disney did not tell us about endangered animals, and orangutans fall into that category. It's been a dark time for orangutans lately, but the new TV show "Orangutan Island" has caught a bunch of viewers, and "Orangutan Outreach," a good organization/website caught some donors, I'll make some references to them in this report.

Diet: Orangutans spend 60% of their daylight hours looking for food, usually sugary yet pulpy fruits such as strychnos, neesia, and figs, but they aren't picky! They'll settle for leaves, seeds, tree bark, and a few kinds of insects. Some characters on "Orangutan Island" even ate catfish and wasps!

Behavior, reproduction, and life span: Orangutans are the most arboreal of the great apes, so they rarely come to the ground, or in contact with others, since they're solitary. Orangutans, like humans, don't have a particular breeding season; unfortunately, the male abandons his mate a few days after mating. The female is then pregnant for 8.5 to 9 months. Later, she gives birth to a single adorable baby that stays with its mother for 6 to 7 years. Orangutans live 30 to 45 years in the wild, and 50 years in captivity.

Physical characteristics: Female orangutans are usually 2.6 to 3.5 feet tall and weigh 110 lbs, whereas males are 3.2 to 4.5 feet tall and weigh 200 lbs. However, both genders have arms that can be up to 7.5 feet! (Imagine them playing basketball!) Male orangutans also have fleshy patches on their cheeks, which signify dominance, even though they're solitary. (The character Hamlet on "Orangutan Island" is starting to develop them, which makes him look like a brave young hero.)

Habitat and range: Orangutans only live in rain forests in Borneo and Sumatra, two islands in Indonesia. As I said earlier, orangutans are the most arboreal of the great apes, which means they live in trees. The mother orangutan and the baby sleep in a nest in the trees that's made out of leaves and branches woven together. Cha Cha, a character from "Orangutan Island," is terrific at making these, and she's only 6 years old!

Predators: Besides humans cutting down their home, orangutans don't have many predators. Sumatran tigers and clouded leopards sometimes eat baby orangutans, but since there aren't any kitties on Orangutan Island, one of the biggest problems for orangutans are snakes, especially pythons and vipers. Cha Cha once picked up a poisonous coral snake with no damage done, but her friend Nadi got bitten by a pit viper on her arm and just barley survived.

Misc: Orangutans are probably the second closest animals to humans, sharing 97% of the same genes, which makes them really smart. Say an orangutan sees a human paddling a canoe, and then it gets out. When the coast is clear, the orangutan jumps into the canoe and paddles it away like it saw the human do. On "Orangutan Island," Hamlet deactivated an electric fence by wedging a stick into it, and the character Ali Baba used a water bottle to catch small fish. Another interesting fact is that "orangutan" means "man of the forest" in Malay.

Orangutans are smart yet shy and solitary, but like all animals, they deserve to live. If you want to help these poor creatures, join the "Orangutan Outreach" organization like I did and sponsor and donate to a baby orangutan. I picked one that was found chained in a box! I know that sounds terrible, but animals are in conditions like that these days. For example, Nadi was found tied to a tree about to go into a logging station, and Hamlet's friend Jordan was found in a circus where he was forced to box other orangutans! None of you want something like that to happen to a peaceful animal, do you?