



SUMATRAN ORANGUTAN CONSERVATION PROGRAMME



Press Release : By PanEco Foundation, Yayasan Ekosistem Lestari and Balai Besar Konservasi Sumber Daya Alam Sumatera Utara

Blind Sumatran orangutan (*Pongo abelii*) parents give birth to healthy twins at North Sumatran rescue centre.

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On Friday 21st January 2011 at approx. 13.30 WIB, Sumatran orangutan (*Pongo abelii*) female "Gober" gave birth to healthy TWIN orangutans, a boy and a girl, provisionally named "Ganteng" (handsome) and "Ginting" (a common local family name).

Twins are not unheard of amongst orangutans and the other great apes (chimpanzees, gorillas and bonobos) but they are certainly not common, and relatively few zoos around the world have experience of them.

This birth is also particularly notable in that BOTH parents are BLIND. The mother, Gober, is an elderly female, probably well over 40 years old, who is blind

in both eyes due to cataracts. She was captured by SOCP vets and BBKSDA in Nov 2008, in a place known locally as Sampan Getek, Langkat, where around 15 orangutans survive in an area of mixed rubber and oil palm gardens that is completely isolated from the forests, being as it is surrounded by oil palm plantations. She was captured because she was routinely raiding villagers crops, as being blind she could not easily find enough food, and if she had not been captured at the time she would certainly have eventually been killed by the villages.

The Father, named Leuser, was originally confiscated as an illegal pet in Aceh Tenggara in February 2004. At that time he was fit and well and was therefore quickly released into the wild in Bukit Tigapuluh National Park, Jambi province, in October 2004. There he lived happily as a wild orangutan, until late 2006, when he was found near a village approximately 40km from the National Park boundaries, having been shot by local villagers 62 times with an air rifle. Three of the rifle pellets lodged in his eyes, 2 in the left and 1 in the right, and he is now totally blind as a result. 16 of the pellets have also been removed from his body, but 46 are still in there. It would be impossible to take them all out without jeopardizing his life, and these will remain in his body until he dies. 3 local villagers were jailed for shooting Leuser, all receiving sentences in excess of 3 months, and leuser was returned to the quarantine centre in November 2006 for long term care.

Both mother and father and the two infants are doing well. Gober is caring for both despite her blindness and as long as she maintains good nutrition there is every chance she will be able to raise them herself. However, vets and staff at the centre must be vigilant and keep a very close eye on them both, and be ready to step in and hand raise one or both of them should the need arise. The father, Leuser is for the time being kept separate from mother and infants. Male orangutans play no role in taking care of infants and may actually harm them, even accidentally, if kept together. However, we will evaluate the situation and if all goes well and the infants are strong enough we may try to introduce him to his offspring later in the year.

Mother and father and the two new twins are all housed at the Batu Mbelin orangutan quarantine centre, near Medan, North Sumatra, Indonesia. This is the only such centre in the world for Sumatran orangutans. It is managed as part of the Sumatran Orangutan Conservation Programme (SOCP), a collaborative programme implemented by the Indonesian Government's Directorate General of Forest Protection and Nature Conservation, the Swiss based PanEco Foundation, the Indonesian Yayasan Ekosistem Lestari (Foundation for a sustainable ecosystem) and Germany's Frankfurt Zoological Society. The SOCP is engaged in all aspects of Sumatran orangutan conservation including:-

- a) Rescue, quarantine and reintroduction of illegal pet orangutans back to the wild,
- b) Surveys and monitoring of remaining wild populations
- c) Research on conservation and behavioural ecology of wild orangutans

- d) Habitat conservation
- e) Conservation education and awareness raising

Construction of the Batu Mbelin orangutan quarantine centre was completed in 2002. Since then over 200 orangutan have been received at the centre and over 130 of these have already been transferred to the SOCP's reintroduction centre in Jambi. The SOCP will shortly also begin reintroducing orangutans at a new location, near the town of Jantho in northern Aceh province.

Normally we try to prevent orangutans breeding at the quarantine centre, until after they have been released to the wild. In the case of Gober and Leuser, however, we decided to make an exception as having an infant to take care of is an excellent way of improving Gober's quality of life. Rather than being bored in here cage with nothing to do, Gober now has the full time responsibility of taking care of her infants, not just one but two of them.

In the long term it is hoped that both infants will eventually be released to a life in the wild, something that has been denied both their parents due to their blindness. Thus despite their handicap, both Gobers and Leuser's genes will be given a second chance to contribute to the conservation of their species in the wilds of Sumatra.

Sumatran orangutans (*Pongo abelii*) are nowadays recognized as a distinct species from their Bornean relatives (*Pongo pygmaeus*). They are protected by law within Indonesia, are listed on appendix one of CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) and as *Critically Endangered* in the IUCN's Red List of Threatened Species. Today they number only around 6,600 in the wild. The biggest threat to their survival is loss of their rainforest habitat, largely due to conversion for oil palm plantations. In addition, adult orangutans are also still frequently killed, e.g. during forest clearance or as pests (e.g. if they raid farmers fruit crops at the forest edge) and any infants that survive normally end up in captivity as illegal pets.

Anyone wishing to help these orangutans, and many others in Sumatra (either others in the quarantine and reintroduction process, or those still in the wild, can do so by making a donation to the PanEco Foundation directly:-

Account number is: CH53 0483 5049 0097 1100 0 (IBAN Number)
Credit Suisse
Private Banking
Bahnhofplatz/Postfach
CH-8400 Winterthur
Switzerland

SWIFT CODE = CRESCHZZ84R

Ref.: SOCP

Account details of YEL, for information, are:-

YEL SOCP Account.

Account name: YEL Qq SOCP

Account no: 027-01-00005-00-0

Bank: Bank Niaga
Jl. Gajah Mada
Medan
Sumatera Utara
Indonesia

Tel: 4151100 or 4144789

SWIFT code: BNIAIDJA

Sample Photos copyright PanEco Foundation/SOCP



Photo 1. Leuser (Father)



Photo.2. Gober (Mother)



Photo 3. Gober and the twins