



# Sumatran Orangutan

*Pongo abelii*

## Classification *What*

*groups does this organism belong to based on characteristics*

*shared with other organisms?*

Class: Mammalia (all mammals)

Order: Primates (prosimians, monkeys, apes, humans)

Family: Hominidae (great apes)

Genus: Pongo (orangutans)

Species: abelii (Sumatran orangutan)



## Distribution *Where in the*

*world does this species live?*

Sumatran orangutans live only on the northern tip of the island of Sumatra in Indonesia. They share the island with a recently identified species, the Tapanuli orangutan, that lives farther south.

## Habitat *What kinds of areas does this species live in?*

They live in the canopies of primary rainforests, swamp forests and riparian forests that include mature fruit trees.

## Physical Description *How would this animal's body shape and size be described?*

Sumatran orangutans are the largest arboreal primate. They are sexually dimorphic with males typically about twice the size of females.

- Males stand 4.5 to 6 feet tall (1.4-1.8 m) and weigh 110-200 pounds (50-90 kg) with the largest reaching 250 pounds (113 kg). Dominant adult males have prominent cheek pads or flanges.
- Females are typically 3 to 4 feet tall (.9-1.3 m) and weigh 66-110 pounds (30-50 kg) though some reach 150 pounds (68 kg).
- Orangutans' arms are longer than their legs which are relatively weak. Males' arm spans can reach 7.5 feet (2.25 m).
- Both males and females have long, sparse orange or red fur that is fine in texture.

## Diet *What does this species eat?*

*In their historic range:* Fruit makes up about 60% of a Sumatran orangutan's diet with figs and durian the most frequently consumed. When fruit is scarce, they eat leaves, flowers, bark and occasionally insects and eggs. Consumption of lorises has been reported.

*At the zoo:* Greens, vegetables, low starch biscuits, konjac gel, and some fruit for training.



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## Predators *What eats this species?*

Predators include clouded leopards, Sumatran tigers and humans who hunt them for the illegal pet trade as well as for food.

## Social Organization *How does this animal interact with others of its species?*

Sumatran orangutans are the least social of all the great apes but are not truly solitary. They tend to form loose groups centered on a dominant male that inhabit a home range large enough to provide enough food for them to thrive. During times when fruit is abundant, small groups may travel and forage together.

## Life Cycle *How does this species mate, raise young, grow and develop?*

Mating of Sumatran orangutans most often occurs during the rainy season of December through May when fruit is most abundant. Adult females are in estrus for 23-33 days and prefer to mate with dominant, flanged males who try to maximize their courtship by keeping other males away. Unflanged males may attempt to mate forcibly. After a gestation period averaging 35 weeks, a single infant – rarely twins – is born. The infant clings to its mother 24 hours a day for up to a year. While becoming more independent after one year, the infant will remain close to its mother's side for two more years. Weaning takes place at about four years, but the youngster will stay near its mother until a brother or sister is born when it is about nine years old. Females become sexually mature between 7 and 10 years old but will not usually give birth until they are 12 to 15 years old. Males usually begin developing cheek flanges at 7 to 9 years and are fully mature at age 14, but development can start as early as 5 years or as late as 17 years and some males never develop flanges.

## Adaptations *What physical and behavioral characteristics enable this animal to survive and thrive?*

- Sumatran orangutans have **long, strong arms** – 1-1/2 times the length of their legs – that enable them to move easily in the trees.
- **Fingers and toes** are long and strong for gripping branches and **opposable thumbs** enable orangutans to use a variety of tools to extract embedded food or use as fly swatters.
- Hands and feet are shaped similarly and are used interchangeably to move **quadrumanously** through the forest canopy.
- Sumatran orangutans use **dozens of different vocalizations** to communicate.
- Males have **large throat sacs** that amplify the **long calls** they use to claim territory and attract females.
- Orangutans are active during the day and **build new nests** each night for sleeping

## Collection Connection

Denver Zoo's Great Apes building is home to six Sumatran orangutans who live in two groups.

- Eirina, a female born 12/30/07, builds beautiful nests. She came to Denver from Germany.
- Jaya, born, 12/13/2007, arrived in the summer of 2019 to Denver to be a companion for Eirina.
- Berani, a male born 2/15/93, Nias, a female born 7/15/88, Hesty, a female born 6/19/10, and Cerah, a female born 3/25/18, all live together as a group. They share time on exhibit and frequently interact with one another. Cerah is the daughter of Nias and Berani. Hesty, also a daughter of Nias, is preparing for motherhood by observing her mother's parenting of Cerah.



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- All six orangutans are part of the Sumatran Orangutan Species Survival Plan. Nias and Berani were approved for breeding through the SSP.
- Denver Zoo, in partnership with National Jewish Health, is a recognized leader in the care of male orangutans who experience serious respiratory diseases.

## Conservation Status *Is this animal at risk for extinction and why?*

*IUCN Status: Critically endangered*

Sumatran orangutans are threatened by severe loss of habitat for agriculture, including palm oil plantations, logging, mining, and tourism. They are also hunted for meat and the illegal pet trade.

## Resources and Where to Learn More

University of Michigan Animal Diversity Web <http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/>

Sumatran Orangutan Conservation Programme <https://www.sumatranorangutan.org/sumatran-orangutans>