



*Dedicated to the Conservation of Orangutans and their Rainforest Home*

# Orangutan

*Pongo pygmaeus*

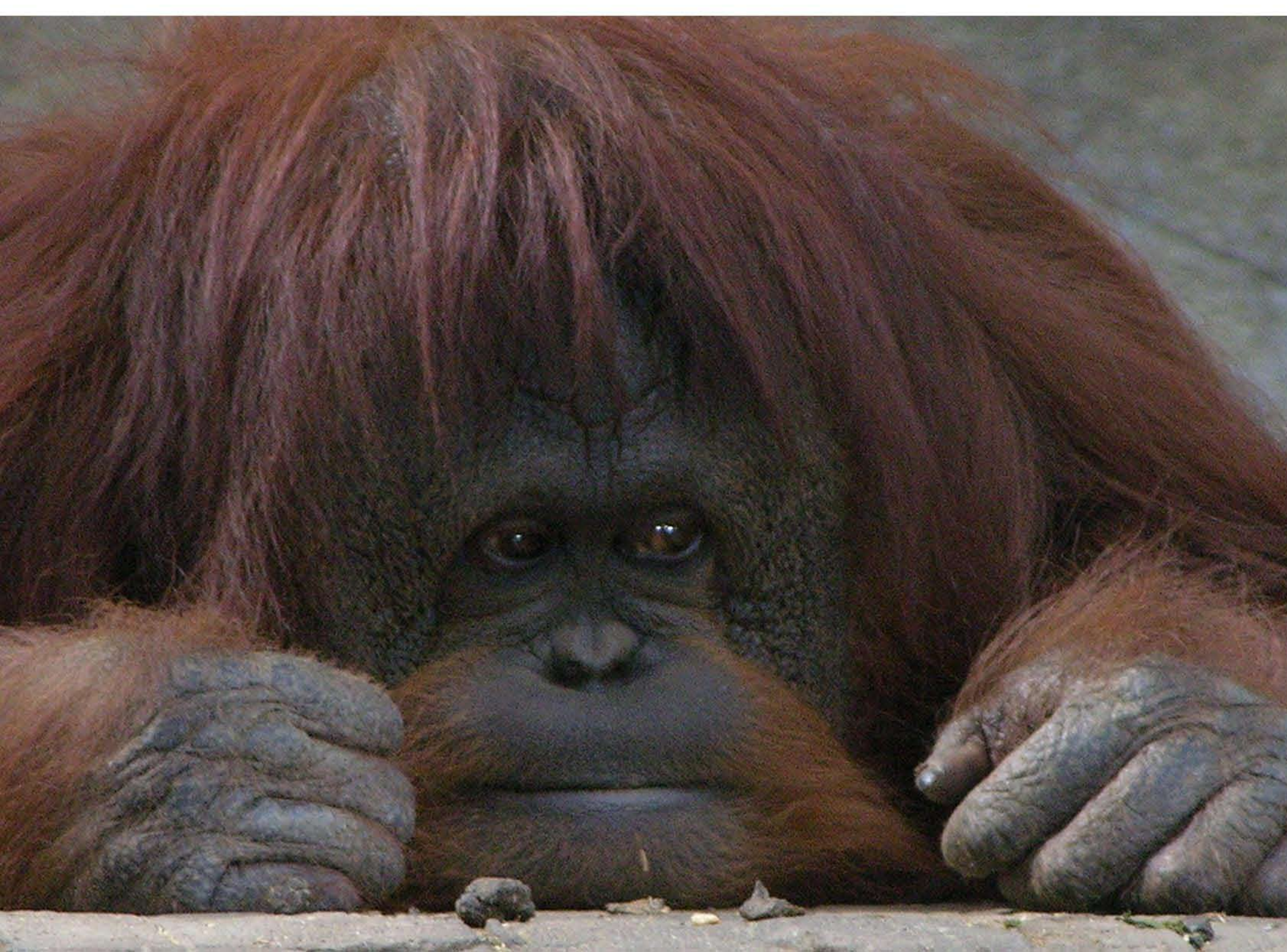
**Description:** The largest living arboreal animals with longer arms than other great apes. Their hair is typically reddish-brown, instead of the brown or black hair typical of other great apes.

**Diet:** They are generally not aggressive and live a mostly solitary life foraging for food. **Fruit makes up 65–90 percent of the orangutan diet.** Orangutans are thought to be the sole fruit disperser for some plant species.

**Conservation:** The destruction and degradation of the tropical rain forest, particularly lowland forest, in Borneo and Sumatra is the main reason orangutans are **threatened with extinction.** This has been caused primarily by human activity (intense legal logging, illegal logging, conversion of forest to **palm oil plantations** and timber estates, mining, clearing forest for settlements, and road construction) and also by large-scale fires facilitated by the El Nino weather phenomena. Additionally, the illegal animal trade has been a factor in the decline of wild orangutan populations. Finally, orangutans are occasionally hunted and eaten by some of the indigenous peoples of Borneo as well as migrant loggers and plantation workers who do not have dietary prohibitions against eating primate bushmeat. **During the past decade orangutan populations have probably decreased by 50% in the wild.**

The Sumatran species is critically endangered and the Bornean species of orangutans is endangered. The total number of Bornean orangutans is estimated to be less than 14 percent of what it was in the recent past (from around 10,000 years ago until the middle of the twentieth century) and this sharp decline has occurred mostly over the past few decades due to human activities and development.

**A major factor in that period of time has been the conversion of vast areas of tropical forest to oil palm plantations in response to international demand** (the palm oil is used for cooking, cosmetics, mechanics, and more recently as source of biodiesel).



**Behavior:** Orangutans have unique adaptations to their life in the treetops. Their feet are designed much like hands for climbing. They have flexible hips for holding on in any direction. Their long arms for reaching and long, strong hands and feet. Some might say orangutans have four hands instead of two hands and two feet. This makes them graceful and agile while climbing through the trees but it makes walking on the ground somewhat slow and awkward. That is why the orangutan is at a great disadvantage on the ground, and why the orangutan rarely comes down from the treetops. Their food is there, their home is there and they are safer there. They are among the most intelligent primates and use a variety of sophisticated tools, also making sleeping nests each night from branches and foliage. **Orangutans are the most arboreal of the great apes, spending nearly all of their time in the trees.** They are **more solitary than other apes;** males and females generally come together only to mate. Orangutan habitat destruction due to logging, mining and forest fires, as well as fragmentation by roads, has been increasing rapidly in the last decade.

Such prolonged association between mother and offspring is rare among mammals. Probably only humans have a more intensive relationship with their mothers. Infant orangutans stay in close contact with their mothers for a long time. **For the first two years of a young orangutan's life, he or she is completely dependent on mother for food and transportation.** A baby orangutan clings to his/her mother's stomach, side, or back while she moves through the trees, and feeds on his/her mother's breast milk.