

SMEC Foundation Supports Orangutan Conservation

In Sumatra

The SMEC Foundation recently provided financial support for the reintroduction into the wild in Sumatra of a young orangutan born and raised in an Australian zoo.

The Australian Orangutan Project is the most prominent Australian group involved with orangutan conservation. It is managed by a consortium of Australian zoos which manages sanctuaries in Indonesia and Malaysia and trains local staff in the monitoring of orangutans in the wild and the rescue and rehabilitation of injured or displaced individuals. Financial support for the project is provided by the zoos themselves as well as from donations in Australia and UN contributions. The project requested Foundation support for animal shelters in its remote forest sanctuary in Jambi/Bukit Tigapuluh National Park in Sumatra. This is the highest priority amongst their projects at present because of the introduction into the wild in 2006 of the first Australian zoo-born orangutan, causing a great deal of interest in Indonesia.

The orangutan is the only one of the great apes found in Asia. The name is Malay/Indonesian and means "Man of the Forest". There are estimated to be around 3000 left in the wild in Borneo and Sumatra. The President of the Australian Orangutan Project, Leif Cocks of Perth Zoo, told SMEC that orangutans can be reared in captivity and reintroduced into the wild, but it is a complex process because orangutans are quite intelligent animals and learn a lot of their survival skills by imitation rather than by instinct. Teaching captive animals to forage and keep away from predators is a lengthy, labour intensive and highly skilled task.

Details of the Australian Orangutan Project are available from the website www.orangutan.org.au