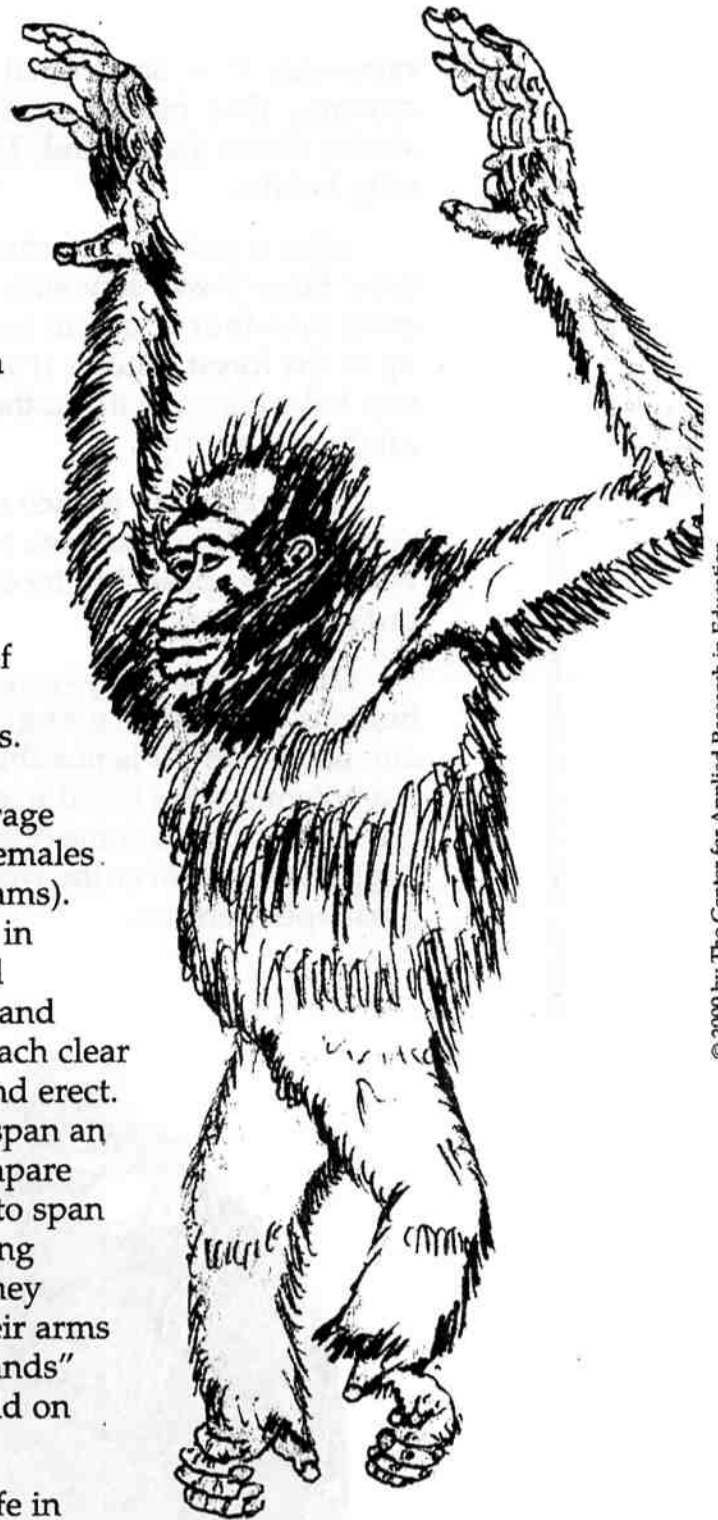


11. Man of the Woods

The only members of the great apes that don't live in Africa live in the southeast Asian country of Indonesia by the equator. The orangutan (oh rang' oo tan) lives in the forests of two island countries called Borneo and Sumatra. These island countries are located between India and Australia. *Orangutan* is a Malayan word that means "man of the woods." Most people know about these great apes from their lovable roles on TV and in movies.

The orangutan has coarse, reddish-brown hair covering most of its body. The males also have reddish-blond beards and mustaches. A male is 3 to 5 feet (91 to 150 centimeters) tall and weighs an average of 165 pounds (75 kilograms). The females average about 90 pounds (40 kilograms). Scientists have found fossil remains in China of giant orangutans that lived thousands of years ago. Both males and females have very long arms that reach clear down to their ankles when they stand erect. Males can stretch their arms out to span an average of 7.5 feet (2.3 meters). Compare this to a person 5 feet tall only able to span 5 feet; then you can imagine how long orangutans' arms really are. Since they spend so much time in the trees, their arms are very strong. All four of their "hands" have big toes like our thumbs to hold on very well.

Orangutans live most of their life in groups of two to five high up in the trees. They seldom come down to the ground. They use their long arms to climb and swing from tree to tree to eat fruit, leaves, and a few bird eggs. When they get thirsty they find a hollow spot in a tree that has collected



rainwater. They are diurnal creatures, meaning they're active in the daytime. They build a crude nest to sleep in at night about five or six stories above the ground. They feel very safe and comfortable in their lofty habitat.

After a gestation of about nine months, females usually have one baby. Since it will stay with her for three or four years, she may not raise more than four young in her life. Females raise their little babies quietly up in the forest canopy. It sounds very scary for babies to be up so high! A tiny baby clings to its mother's hair as she travels 60 feet up in the rainforest canopy.

The orangutan is such a quiet, peaceful creature that the people of Sumatra and Borneo have a legend that explains how the "man of the woods" can speak, but he chooses not to speak for fear that humans will put him to work.

Orangutans really have no known enemies other than humans. If humans don't stop cutting down the forests, the orangutan won't have any habitat left. It is possible the species could become extinct because so many females are killed in order to capture their babies for zoos. Scientists are trying to raise some orangutans in captivity to star in movies and supply zoos all over the world since people just love to watch these funny great apes perform.

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