

Press Release: Orangutan Caring Week 2020

Oct. 18, 2020

It's Orangutan Caring Week...but who cares?

A promotional banner for Orangutan Caring Week 2020. The top section features the title 'ORANGUTAN CARING WEEK' in large, bold, white letters on a dark green background. Below this is a photograph of a man wearing a light blue surgical mask and a green t-shirt with the 'COP' logo (Centre for Orangutan Protection) on the back. He is holding a young orangutan in his arms. To the right of the photo, the dates 'November 8-14, 2020' are displayed in a bold, dark green font. Below the dates, the 2020 theme is listed: '2020 Theme: Protecting Biodiversity for a Healthy Planet'. At the bottom of the banner, a dark green bar contains the text 'For more information visit: ORANGUTANCARINGWEEK.ORG' in white.

Orangutan Caring Week is a worldwide event held annually every November. It began as Orangutan Awareness Week but it soon became apparent that just being aware of the plight of orangutans was not enough. People need to care...and care enough to be moved to action to save these incredible red-haired apes and their rainforest homes.

Rainforests and related ecosystems provide important services from climate moderation, to water quality and erosion control, to storehouses of genetic, species and ecological biodiversity. Rainforests need to be sustainably managed to maintain these services. Orangutan Caring Week helps to inform citizens in our own communities of this connection and continues to enlighten local people in areas near orangutan habitat.

This year's theme: "PROTECTING BIODIVERSITY FOR A HEALTHY PLANET"

A very appropriate theme has been chosen for Orangutan Caring Week this year as the COVID-19 pandemic has heightened our understanding of how our health and that of the planet are linked to maintaining and respecting biodiversity in all forms. **All life on earth depends on a healthy planet!** Many groups will be joining us once again so watch for activities and postings about our annual weeklong celebration of the great red ape on our social media.

"When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world. All living creatures need other creatures and plants in one way or another - even if the connection is not so clear."

(Young People's Trust for the Environment, "Why do we need to conserve biodiversity?" <https://tinyurl.com/yxgebzve>)

Although the COVID-19 virus has not yet been observed in great apes in the wild, there is abundant scientific evidence showing that our closest living relatives are susceptible to diseases transmitted by humans.

"Scientists fear that the virus, which is thought to have originated in bats and jumped to humans, could just as easily jump to great apes — gorillas, chimpanzees, bonobos and orangutans — which share 97 to 99 percent of their DNA with people. If the virus were to infect even one wild ape, experts fear it could spread unchecked and wipe out an entire population. There would be no way to stop it in the wild."

*(Richard C. Paddock, "Virus Delays Orangutans' Long Awaited Return Home,"
New York Times, May 6, 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/y9efhpyf>)*

The combined impacts of habitat loss, habitat degradation, illegal hunting, and an illegal pet trade, have pushed the orangutan toward an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild and now they face a new possible threat of a disease that can potentially add to that risk.

"We are worried about this and are taking it very seriously," said Ian Singleton, director of the Sumatran Orangutan Conservation Program. "If it happens, it will be a catastrophe."

Orangutan rescue and rehabilitation centers are taking every precaution to protect orangutans in their care, as well as, protecting staff and caretakers from possible transmission of the coronavirus, but expenses are high, and they are facing extra challenges in these difficult times. With revenues down they are dealing with added expenses for food, gowns, gloves, testing, as well as other medical and cleaning supplies directly needed due to the pandemic.

Centers are still taking in rescues yet they are not able to release captive orangutans that are ready to be reintroduced back in to the wild for fear of spreading the virus to wild populations further challenging already limited space situations.

Orangutans live in total harmony with nature - people do not - but we need nature for our very existence. We are already facing a climate crisis and a mass extinction threatening the very existence of thousands of animals and plant species, as well as threatening human populations, and the urgency of action has never been more important. These intelligent, sentient beings have lived in perfect harmony with nature for millions of years yet due to human activity their populations have declined by more than half over the past 60 years, and their habitat has been reduced by at least 55% over just the past 20 years.

To contain this virus and to stop the next pandemic, we need to start protecting wildlife habitats. Some of the deadliest new diseases, including COVID-19, Ebola, SARS, and HIV, have all arisen when man has crossed the natural barriers between human and animal populations. It is imperative that we afford critically endangered species their right to safe, thriving habitats unbothered by human encroachment and interference.

***"Protecting nature is our first, best, and most cost-effective line of defense against future pandemics."
(Sahir Doshi and Nicole Gentile, "When Confronting a Pandemic, We Must Save Nature to Save Ourselves,"
Center for American Progress, April 20, 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/y2gp6vrt>)***

By saving orangutans, we save ourselves and our life sustaining environment. If we can protect and save this closest of evolutionary cousins and their rainforest homes, it would mean we are making the necessary changes to possibly protect all life on earth.

So, who cares? There are dozens of hardworking, dedicated organizations, conservation groups, rescue and rehabilitation centers all working to save these incredible great apes.

We cannot all have boots on the ground, but we can fully support those who do whether financially or with our time and efforts. [Many of these groups](#), along with zoos and animal facilities worldwide, as well as individuals, will be participating in Orangutan Caring Week with special social media campaigns, awareness and fundraising events using this as a perfect opportunity to spread awareness about the plight of orangutans and the urgent dangers facing their rainforest homes with the goal of motivating people to care – and to care enough to be moved to action. ***If ever there was a time to care, that time is now!***

