

SUPPORTING MATERIAL

FIRST WORLD ATLAS OF GREAT APES AND THEIR CONSERVATION

POVERTY GREATEST THREAT TO APES

Klaus Toepfer, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), said:

"We have a duty to rescue our closest living relatives as part of our wider responsibilities to conserve the ecosystems they inhabit".

"You only have to look at the tropical forests, home to the great apes. Economists now calculate that they are worth \$60 billion a year as a result of their ability to remove and store global warming gases from the atmosphere alone".

"Along with other ecosystems, such forests are also invaluable sources of genetic material. These are forming the basis of a new industrial revolution in areas from food and agriculture to pharmaceuticals and chemicals. It is a moral issue of the highest importance. By conserving the habitats of the great apes, we are helping to overcome poverty and to conserve the natural wealth upon which current and future human generations depend. It seems a small price to pay," he added.

Mr Toepfer said he hoped the new atlas and the upcoming inter-governmental meeting in Kinshasa would trigger even greater action by identifying conservation priorities and by generating investment from donor governments and the private sector in the great ape range states.

Rt Hon Jim Knight MP UK Minister for Biodiversity comments

"The great apes are our nearest animal relatives. They are self-aware, social creatures with cultures and politics, and communicate through both signs and language.

"Careful management of their forest and mountain habitats is absolutely vital as we try to manage and resolve the conflicts between apes and humans – balancing the conservation needs of great apes with the precarious livelihoods of the people who live in these areas.

"It is critical that we act now to ensure the survival of great apes in the wild. We will not get a second chance.

"Governments have a fundamental role to play – but so do millions of ordinary people who, through their compassion and their action, can help to turn the tide of the decline of great apes."

FRAGMENTATION

Habitat fragmentation is a hazard as it isolates great ape populations from one another, increasing their vulnerability to random events such as forest fire and the longer-term genetic impacts of inbreeding. The *Atlas* presents new information on

the distribution of the Cross River gorilla, one of the two subspecies of western gorilla, which has only around 250 to 280 individuals left. This small number of animals is distributed amongst more than ten fragmented highland areas in the border area of Nigeria and Cameroon. (3)

Mark Leighton Chair, GRASP Interim Scientific Committee comments that conservation effort should be focussed on areas where the populations are still viable and has identified a number of priority populations which illustrate why a large set of populations are required to maintain the genetic diversity.

GREAT APES AND THE GROWING BUSHMEAT CRISIS IN AFRICA

Where forests remain they are being plundered in a way that is unprecedented. Population movement as a result of wars, urbanisation and improved road access has reduced the influence of cultural traditions and the trade in bushmeat has increased across many range states. Great apes are also susceptible to snares set for other species such as antelopes.

The *Atlas* raises concerns over the increasing trade in great ape bushmeat, and the sale of orphans to expatriates wanting to 'rescue them'. Entire groups of adults may be killed to capture one orphan for sale.

The illegal bushmeat trade, of which a proportion is great ape meat, is estimated at US\$1 billion annually. In Central Africa, a single chimpanzee or gorilla carcass can fetch the equivalent of US\$20-25. By comparison gorilla tourism generated from US \$60,000 – 525,000 annual revenue per participating park between 1985 and 1996.

The issue is complex, as **Glyn Davies, Director of Conservation Programmes, Zoological Society of London** explains:

“Even though apes comprise a small fraction of the bushmeat trade in most instances, the impact on their populations is devastating. Every effort needs to be made to exclude apes from the trade and, wherever possible, build on cultural and religious taboos, which prohibit the consumption of ape meat. Awareness raising campaigns which explain the law and the plight of ape populations are needed to achieve this, and to support improved law enforcement for these rare species, and the national parks where they are found.

It is also increasingly clear that disease is playing a part in the decline of ape populations and new research is needed, along with stronger efforts to limit disease transmission.”

FRAGILE HABITATS

The Atlas maps the environmental impact of human development. Predictions reported include that the orangutan will lose 47% of its habitat in the next 5 years (4); co-editors of the Atlas, Julian Caldecott and Lera Miles of UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre observe that:

“Within a generation – without better protection – we could see species becoming too depleted to survive long term in the wild” .

"The areas where great apes are at least risk from hunting occur 3-10 km from roads and these areas are dwindling. Roads provide access for mining and logging, fragment habitats and facilitate transport of bush meat. As such they play a central role in the loss of the great ape."

The GLOBIO computer model puts under 30% of the habitat of each of the African great apes in this low impact category and projects that this will be less than 10% by 2030. For orangutans less than 36% of their current habitat is low impact and this is projected to be under 1% by 2030.

This prediction is confirmed by **Ian Singleton**, Scientific Director, Sumatran Orangutan Conservation Programme:

"The biggest threats to the orangutan are logging and habitat fragmentation, such as that proposed by the Ladia Galaska road scheme. The ill-advised and heavily criticised Ladia Galaska road scheme may well prove the 'final nail in the coffin' that puts the long-term conservation of Sumatran orangutans beyond our reach."

"Fifty years from now only 7 of the current 13 orangutan populations are expected to remain. Of these, 6 will consist of fewer than 20 individuals. This would mean a total world population of just 234 wild Sumatran orangutans by the year 2054."

"In contrast, if logging and removal of orangutans through hunting could be halted today, we could expect to have in the region of 6570 remaining in 50 years."

"Clearly, rapid cessation of logging has immense implications for the prospects of Sumatran orangutan survival. But we have no reason for optimism. The Ministry of Forestry itself acknowledges that the current rate of forest loss nationwide is circa 3.8 million ha/year. Furthermore, within Aceh, where the vast majority of Sumatran orangutans occur, rates of forest loss are about to increase dramatically as part of the Aceh rebuilding process and as a result of the peace process."

"If the recently signed peace deal in Aceh does bear fruit we expect habitat destruction rates to rocket. Many existing logging concessions and oil palm plantations have been lying dormant since the conflict started. We can expect businesses to work as quickly and as rapidly as they can in order to recoup their losses."

CONCLUSIONS

Charlotte Uhlenbroek, primate researcher and TV presenter, believes that it is not too late to make a difference.

"The international community needs to invest in long-term conservation projects which form positive partnerships. Local people's attitudes are critical to the survival of the apes in any given area so projects that help to develop sustainable livelihoods in tandem with ape protection, will be most successful."

"In other parts of the world, people can help by choosing paper and furniture that is recycled or that has Forestry Stewardship Council certification. In particular, avoid timber that might have been illegally logged from great ape habitats."

"It is also possible to make a contribution to great ape conservation by supporting or volunteering your time to one of the charities linked with the Great Ape Survival Project."

To donate directly to GRASP, please visit
http://www.unep.org/grasp/Support_GRASP/index.asp

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Case-studies

Several case studies are available illustrating different aspect of threat or conservation effort:

[Brave rangers](#)

[Plight orphans](#)

[Priority populations](#)

[Tsunami](#)

Footnotes

(1) According to the Human Development Index (HDI) of the 23 states, 21 are ranked between 109 and 177 (Sierra Leone, the poorest country on the index). Countries are characterised by conflict, poverty and demand for extraction of natural resources, all challenges that make organised long-term social investments difficult.

(2) p.240

(3) p.109

(4) p.240