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Preliminary survey of the southernmost Tapanuli orangutan population

The newly discovered orangutan species *Pongo tapanuliensis* faces population declines driven by habitat fragmentation and hunting. Historically, the Tapanuli orangutan occurred from the uplands of West Toba lake in North Sumatra to the Bukit Tinggi district, West Sumatra, but the current population is limited to the Batang Toru ecosystem, North Sumatra, in three forest blocks separated by a river and roads. Most Tapanuli orangutan populations are in unprotected forest areas, although the southernmost population is in the Lubuk Raya Reserve.

With the support of Tropical Forest Conservation Action–Sumatra, we conducted a preliminary study of the Tapanuli orangutan in the Lubuk Raya Reserve in January 2021. In a 10 km transect survey we did not encounter any orangutan nests, although we observed three nests outside the targeted transect, and a habitat suitability analysis showed that 44% of the area could potentially be used by orangutans. We spoke with 20 people in seven villages and found that they see orangutans in this area, especially those people who live on the border of natural forests and agricultural lands. Most correspondents indicated they do not kill orangutans, although previous studies have found that hunting has caused drastic declines in Sumatran orangutan populations.

Although zero losses have been proposed as a means to save the Tapanuli orangutan (*Oryx*, 55, 10–11), other approaches are needed. More than half of the species' population occurs outside protected areas, and we observed extensive agricultural expansion in the area we surveyed, which could trigger conflict with orangutans. However, many local people are aware of the conservation status of this species as the result of an ongoing campaign by the orangutan conservation project of the United States Agency for International Development, which began in 2007. Any strategy to protect the Tapanuli orangutan will need to involve communities and the private sector, with collaborative management, and the establishment of a sanctuary for the species that could be used for ecotourism.

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Primate Specialist Group ARRC Task Force

In early 2020, the IUCN Species Survival Commission Primate Specialist Group officially launched the ARRC (Avoid, Reduce, Restore, Conserve) Task Force (arctaskforce.org), to provide advice to companies and banks to Avoid ape habitat, Reduce impacts where avoidance is not possible, Restore habitats that have been negatively affected, and contribute positively to ape Conservation. Development projects such as mines and hydroelectric dams occur throughout ape habitat, and are a significant threat to their survival. The task force provides guidance on the distribution of apes and the location of priority areas, so that projects with the most significant anticipated impacts can be avoided. It also offers technical guidance to improve the practices of those projects that proceed, to reduce their impacts on apes. The task force is guided by a steering committee of 20 members, nine from ape range countries, and draws from the expertise of c. 150 ape experts. One major achievement of the task force was the inclusion, in the latest iteration of the Guidance Note to the International Finance Corporation (IFC) Performance Standard 6 (PS6; best practice lending standards for biodiversity), of a paragraph regarding projects operating in great ape habitat. As a result, companies seeking loans will need to engage with the task force to avoid great ape habitat and, where avoidance is not possible, develop appropriate mitigation measures.

The task force has advised c. 20 projects, leading to improvement in baseline surveys, increased avoidance of ape habitat, and improved practices, with better outcomes for apes. The task force will also review and monitor sensitive projects, will not be involved with projects where impacts to apes are deemed too significant to be mitigated, and will not engage with projects that directly or indirectly affect apes within World Heritage Sites. In addition to advising projects, lending banks and governments, the task force is also committed to strengthening capacity on these subjects