



Forest Chatter



Issue 37 | September 2021

BOS Australia | + 61 2 9011 5455 | PO Box 3916 Mosman NSW 2088

From the President ...

Welcome to our newest edition of Forest Chatter. While I wish I could start this edition as the last one, announcing another successful orangutan release, the situation in Indonesia has changed. The number of COVID-19 cases has rapidly increased, and our main priority is to do whatever is necessary to protect our staff and the orangutans in our care.

In addition to applying stricter biosecurity protocols, we have implemented regular COVID-19 testing, tracking, and treatment for staff. We also carry out antigen and PCR testing on the orangutans to ensure they stay safe.

With our centres still closed and numerous offline funding streams inaccessible, these efforts bring with them a new challenge to tackle. Importantly, I can assure you we are as dedicated as ever to protecting orangutans and their habitat.

I can share other good news with the great success of our two online events in August: World Orangutan Day and the streaming event of the documentary 'Eyes of the Orangutan'. A huge thank you to everyone who joined.

In this edition, you will learn about two anniversaries we celebrate this year. Find out what's on our forest school students' timetable and how we help our unreleasable

orangutans. And don't miss the interview with Lou Grossfeldt about her fascinating new book 'Amanka Stories: Saving the Last Apes'.

Tony Gilding, President



30 years of conservation

This year marks the 30th anniversary of BOS Foundation's work to save the Bornean orangutan and its habitat. BOS Australia joined as a partner ten years later, celebrating its 20th anniversary this month. Let's have a look back at some milestones.

It all started in 1991. In the year of its inception, the BOS Foundation released the first orangutans in one of the last intact coastal rainforests in East Kalimantan. Seven years later, the team in Indonesia had rescued over 500 orangutans from areas of habitat loss and conflict.

BOS continued to grow by establishing two orangutan rescue and rehabilitation centres, securing two release sites for orangutans in East and Central Kalimantan, protecting and restoring a 309,000-hectare peat-swamp forest, and by building pre-release islands

for releasable and sanctuary islands for unreleasable orangutans.

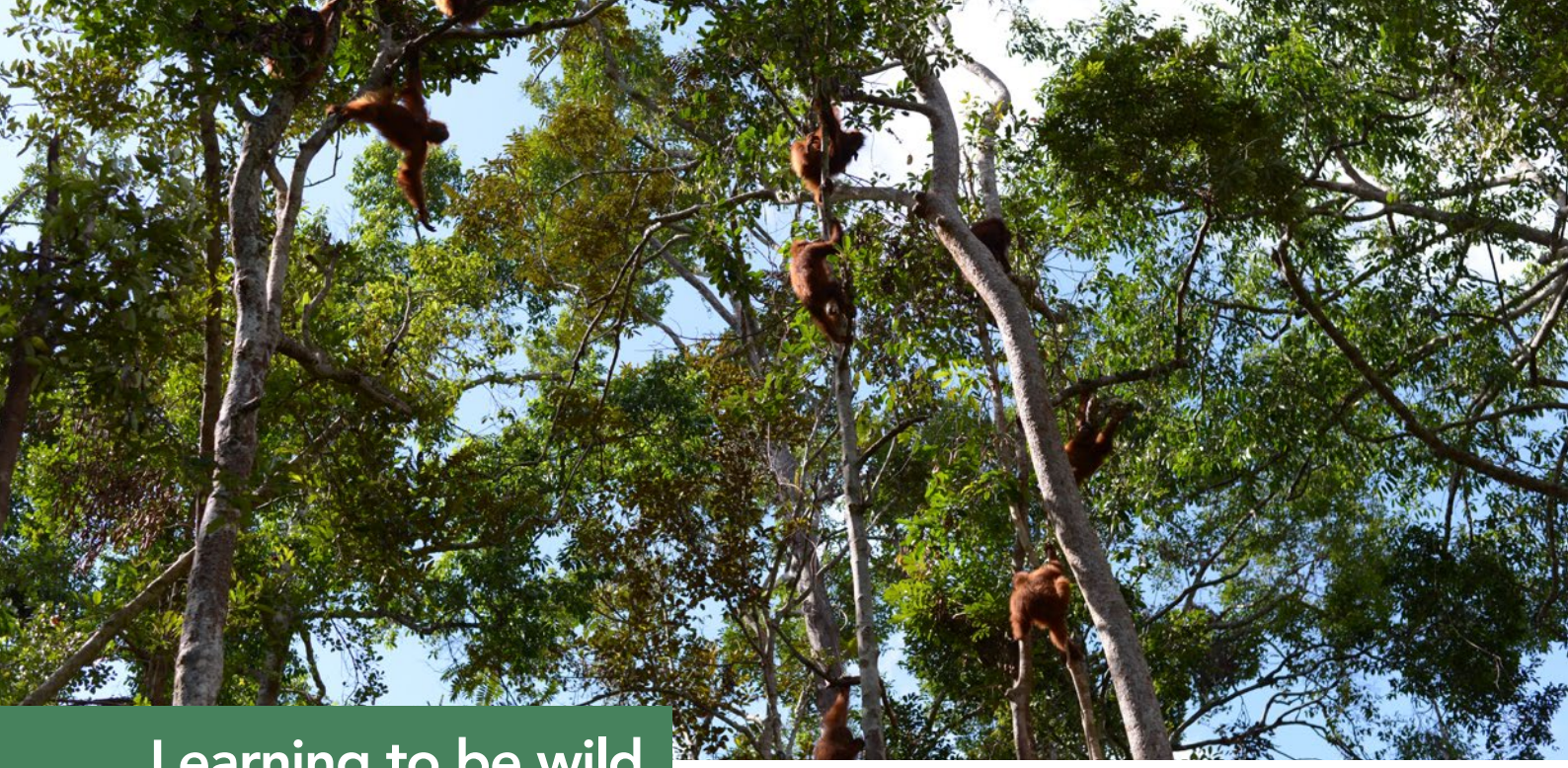
BOS Australia joined as a partner in September 2001 with a group of four dedicated Australians who founded Balikpapan Orangutan Survival Australia. The name later changed to Borneo Orangutan Survival Australia, but the cause remained the same: Supporting BOS Foundations' work to protect the Bornean Orangutan and its habitat.

Over the years, we have reached dozens of important milestones. But we did not accomplish these alone. Year after year, it has been you, our amazing supporters, who have made these achievements possible.

While we may already have accomplished a lot, there is still so much we need to do. So, let's continue to save orangutans and their habitat together!

Check out what we made possible with your help in [this short video](#) about the last three decades.





Learning to be wild

Most of the orangutans we care for are orphans. Normally, they would learn all the skills they need to survive in the forest from their mums. In our centres, human surrogate mothers take over this role. In the most unique school on the planet, they teach the littlies how to be wild.

Like every human school, our Forest School in Central Kalimantan has it all: victories, failures, fun, fights and friendships. On a normal school day, our students eagerly wait to get out of their night enclosures and off to their forest classrooms. The little ones jump aboard one of our



wheelbarrow school buses while the older ones walk on their own, hand-in-hand with their babysitters, arm in arm with their buddies - or by turning summersaults. You guessed right: Latter are the latecomers.

If you have ever wondered what's on an orangutan's timetable, here is your chance to find out. Come and follow us into the classrooms and see which skills our little students have to learn and hone before they are ready to conquer the Bornean rainforest.

Orangutans spend most of their day foraging for food. So, it's no surprise that skills related to eating are popular subjects, with **Fruit Eating** being a favourite. If you know Beni from the documentary series 'Orangutan Jungle School' on Stan, you know what we are talking about.

Dependent on season and location, orangutans can feed on hundreds of different species of wild fruits. Therefore, it is critical that they can identify which fruits are safe to eat and how to eat them. Eating whole, wild figs and guava fruits is pretty straightforward. But our students also need to know how to eat harder to access fruits, such as durians and coconuts, which require cracking, peeling and breaking if they want to access the pulp and seeds inside.

As you can imagine, this class calls for a lot of technique and talent and ensures quite a bit of drama and frustration. Especially when your more skilled classmates already enjoy their fruits and your coconut still doesn't show the slightest crack.

Even though leaves are far less popular than fruits, they are still an important and plentiful food option. In particular, young leaf shoots, which are more tender and nutritious than their mature ones. During **Leaf Eating** class, our surrogate mothers show their students which leaves are safe to eat and where to find them.

In the dry season, wild orangutans add cambium, the juicy layer beneath a tree's bark, to their diet. The skill associated with this food source is **Bark Stripping**. Our orangutans learn how to peel back the bark on specific trees, scrape off the soft cambium with their teeth, chew and ingest what is nutritious, and spit out the remaining inedible fibres.

Lots of attention is required when it comes to our next skill on the schedule: **Invertebrate Eating**. Termites, ants, and bee larvae form a significant part of the orangutans' diet. In particular, termites are readily accessible on the forest floor and provide lots of protein. The teachers encourage their students to break off chunks of rotting wood and then suck out the termites with a quick and sharp inhalation. Tickle alert!

The last skill related to food is **Pith Extraction**. Peeling back the protective exterior of a plant exposes its soft, inner pith. Especially, the pith of rattan is a diet staple. In the forest, rattan is plentiful and available throughout the year. Therefore, our red cousins must know how to spot edible rattan and peel away its spiky exterior to reveal the soft pith inside.

And what do orangutans do after eating? They take a nap! So, let's quickly move on to the next skill: **Nest Building.** Wild orangutans build a new nest every day, between 11 and 20 metres high up in the trees, to rest in during the day and sleep in at night. Once they have found a good spot on a sturdy branch, they bend or break other branches in towards it and weave them in place to build a basic foundation. Then they add smaller and softer branches on top of the base to create a comfy 'mattress'. In their treetop beds, orangutans are safe from the dangers lurking on the forest floor and protected from the elements. As you can imagine, it takes some time until the result actually looks like a nest.

Apart from humans, orangutans have very few natural predators. Young orangutans are the most susceptible to forest predators, like clouded leopards, crocodiles, large pythons, and venomous snakes. In **Predator Awareness** class, the babysitters use rubber snakes and scream as loud as possible to teach our little students a lesson in fear.

To get away from a dangerous animal as quickly as possible, climbing a tree is a perfect choice. That's why orphaned orangutans need regular **Tree-Climbing** practice to master this essential survival skill.

Several of our caregivers are trained in tree-climbing and will climb alongside their little students to encourage them to spend more time up high.

Let's stay in the trees and start **Swaying.** Orangutans often use their weight to bend the trunks of small trees and branches to propel themselves from tree to tree. This is an important skill to learn in Forest School, as it is a more efficient and safe way to travel than climbing down one tree to the forest floor and up the next. Our forest school students are copying and learning this practical skill from each other as well as our last skill on the schedule: **Brachiating.**

While brachiating, orangutans swing hand over hand from one branch to another. By being able to brachiate under multiple branches, orangutans can move more freely through the forest. As the largest arboreal animal on earth, their weight would restrict their access to many areas and food sources if they only walked on top of branches.

As you can see, the stakes are high in Forest School. And we couldn't be more proud of each student who graduates and can finally prove all the learned skills in their true home in the Bornean Rainforest.



Islands of hope

Unfortunately, not all orangutans in our care can attend Forest School. Many are physically disabled or mentally unsuitable.

Amongst them are victims of the wildlife tourism industry. They share their fate with thousands of other orangutans who continue to be abused for entertainment purposes in safari parks, circuses or zoos.



© AARON GEKOSKI

In 2006, we repatriated 48 orangutans from Thailand. They were forced to live like humans for entertainment in boxing shows (photo) and other performances. So far, we could only release a few of them back into the wild. Others are coming from similar facilities in other countries or Indonesia itself.

The wildlife tourism industry makes enormous profits from orangutan exploitation. The questionable businesses not only cost the animals their freedom and dignity; the orangutans forced to work for them are often forever damaged and ill.

Sharing 97 per cent of the same DNA as humans and being very close to them, many of the illegally trafficked orangutans contract human-borne diseases. If we would release them back to the rainforest, the threat to existing wild populations is too great.

Therefore, many of the repatriated ones are waiting in our centres.

However, the unreleasable ones are not destined to live the rest of their lives in cages. BOS has set itself the goal of becoming the world's first rescue centre without cages for healthy orangutans.

That's why we are building forested islands where the unreleasable ones can live in small groups under the watchful eyes of our technicians.

We have already built 15 islands separated by canals. There, orangutans can now spend a dignified life in a natural and species-appropriate environment.

But we urgently need to build more islands. If you would like to support our effort to give our unreleasable orangutans the life they deserve, please go to born2bewild.org/en.

HELLO, I AM LOU GROSSFELDT



Lou Grossfeldt is BOS Australia's longest serving committee member and an internationally renowned expert in great ape conservation and primate husbandry and management. Forest Chatter talked with her about her new book 'Amanka Stories: Saving the Last Apes'.

Could you please tell our readers what 'Amanka' means and what the book is about?

Amanka is a word used by people living in the rural northwest of Uganda. It means 'Family'. Dave Blissett (photo) and I wrote this book to raise awareness of the plight of our ape family and to share the stories of the unsung heroes who are trying to help them. It's about amazing people we met along our journey who inspired us.

One of the many people who inspired you is Jane Goodall.

I feel very blessed that I was able to spend time with Jane Goodall in my career. One of the highlights for me was being on a plane with her. We talked about the power of telling conservation through stories to motivate people to conserve and appreciate wildlife.

Is there a story in your book that touched you in particular?

It's the collaboration, the sum of all stories, that makes the book so exciting. I think we often operate in silos, and we could get so much further along if we would have a shared platform. Getting so many people together who were willing to share their stories is what probably touched me most.

What message do you hope people take away from reading your book?

I hope people understand that conservation is about thinking globally but acting locally. It's about making sustainable choices and finding joy in the small things again. I am very worried that if we don't reconnect with our ape family and with nature and wildlife in general, they are all gone one day.



**Amanka Stories:
Saving the Last Apes**

Lou Grossfeldt,
Dave Blissett

Melbourne Books, 2021
ISBN: 9781925556704

Order now!



BOS Australia
primates helping primates

Borneo Orangutan Survival Australia

+ 61 2 9011 5455

PO Box 3916
Mosman NSW 2088

facebook.com/bosaustralia
instagram.com/bosaustralia

Our newsletter is proudly written and produced by BOS Australia volunteers.

All images © BOS 2021

Thank you for your continued support.



We love hearing from you

We know you've been spreading the orangutan word, so why not tell us about what you're up to? Email contact@orangutans.com.au or post your photos online at facebook.com/bosaustralia or instagram.com/bosaustralia

Can you help us?

Your donations provide food, shelter, protection, medicine and companionship for orangutans in our care. Visit www.orangutans.com.au to help us help them.

Donations by cheque are payable to Borneo Orangutan Survival (BOS) Australia at PO Box 3916, Mosman NSW 2088.

Make a one-off or regular payment via direct debit or by credit card either online or by calling us on +61 2 9011 5455. We now accept **Paypal** donations too! See the link on the homepage of our website.

Save paper and the environment and opt-in to receive our e-letter via email at contact@orangutans.com.au