

THE EFFECT OF WILDLIFE TOURISM ON A POPULATION OF WILD AND SEMI-WILD SUMATRAN ORANGUTANS (*Pongo abelii*) IN BUKIT LAWANG, INDONESIA

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Growing concern for conservation has resulted in a closer relationship between tourism and the environment. Nature tourism has become increasingly popular and commercially viable, with Indonesia's tourism industry hosting more than 6 million international tourists in 2009, bringing in approximately US\$7 billion. With species such as the Sumatran orangutan (*Pongo abelii*) listed as critically endangered, there is great potential for *ecotourism* ventures to contribute both to primate conservation as well as to the development of local communities through the revenue it provides. However, amongst other fields, there are also a series of negative impacts on wildlife that can occur if tourism is not carefully managed. These can include: destruction of habitat, alteration of natural behaviours, altered patterns of habitat use, disease transmission and increased chances of poaching through over-habituatation. In these cases what is occurring is *wildlife tourism*, which is based solely on interactions with wildlife and does not carry the sense of responsibility seen in ecotourism. We present quantitative data on the negative effects of wildlife tourism on a mixed population of rehabilitated orangutans and wild orangutans in Bukit Lawang. These include instances of range restriction as well as two observed cases of mother-infant cannibalism. In addition, the ongoing efforts of the Orangutan Information Centre, Indonesia, and the Sumatran Orangutan Society UK to remediate the problems associated with wildlife tourism will be discussed. Lastly, the value and long-term viability - or lack thereof - of great ape tourism especially with regards to orangutans will be discussed.

Keywords: orangutan, conservation, primate tourism, cannibalism