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**Confiscation of illegally held orphan Sumatran Orangutan**

# **SUCCESSFUL RESCUE: ILLEGAL ‘PET’ ORPHAN ORANGUTAN SAVED IN SUMATRA, CLOSE TO THE TRIPA PEAT SWAMP FORESTS**

[Aceh Province – Sumatra – Indonesia]

Today an Orangutan confiscation team comprising staff and a veterinarian from the Sumatran Orangutan Conservation Program (SOCP: PanEco Foundation and Yayasan Ekosistem Lestari), local armed police, and field staff from BKSDA Aceh (the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry’s nature conservation agency in Aceh), successfully confiscated a 2 year old orphan Sumatran orangutan from a location where it is was being detained illegally as a pet in a rural village in Aceh Barat Daya District, close to the Tripa peat swamp forests in Aceh Province, Indonesia.

The confiscation team arrived at the scene with police at 10:45 am today and immediately found the young male orangutan tied by the leg to the outside of a small shop, along a dusty road. Specialist orangutan veterinarian drh Yenny Saraswati of the SOCP promptly conducted a health inspection of the young orangutan. “His condition is not so good”, she concluded. “He is suffering from malnutrition, his skin is very dry and he has a wound on his leg from the rope he was tied up with, obviously from trying to get it off. We will take care of him at the our orangutan medical centre and monitor his condition, then when he’s fit and well we can eventually release him back to the wild at one of our reintroduction centres.”.

Police, BKSDA and SOCP confiscation team leader, Santi Lubis, calmly negotiated the handover of the young male orangutan with the shop owner. A crowd of 50 local villagers nevertheless gathered during the proceedings, including village elders and many children, all closely monitoring what developed into quite a tense situation.

“Confiscating orangutans being kept illegally as pets can be a dangerous task. There have been occasions in this area when we have been threatened with violence by angry neighbours. Fortunately, today we we’re well supported by armed police, who

helped keep the situation under control and prevented things from escalating”, said Santi. “The contribution of the local police today was exceptional and they should be congratulated”, she added.

Upon arrival, local police informed the villager that she was breaking the law and that she would be facing prosecution if she was unwilling to cooperate. According to Indonesian law No 5, 1990, the “conservation act”, it is illegal to capture, kill or trade orangutans in Indonesia and doing so carries a penalty of up to 5 years in prison and a 100 million Rupiah fine. A case in February this year saw an illegal orangutan trader sentenced to 8 months in prison in North Sumatra province. Despite the law being very clear, this was the first ever successful prosecution of an illegal orangutan owner in Sumatra.

Whilst clearly breaking the law, negotiations with the orangutans owner still took some time. The woman who was keeping the animal had obviously grown very fond of him and explained how her financial situation had improved whilst she had been keeping him profiting from the fact that more customers had been visiting her shop. A local villager told the team that she had been keeping the orangutan, which she had named Rahul, for over 1 year, and that her husband had captured him whilst working on a nearby palm oil plantation.

Dr Ian Singleton, Director of Conservation at the SOCP explained “We have been forced to confiscate about 15 orangutans in this part of Aceh over the last few years. All of them are now effectively refugees, from forests that have been cut down by plantation companies. Today's rescue is the second orangutan from Tripa to be saved this week and another example of how urgently action is needed to protect Tripa's unique Sumatran orangutan population. We all really must urge the Indonesian government to halt all forest clearance and the setting of illegal fires in Tripa as soon as possible if these animals are to have any chance of surviving the year. Offenders need to be prosecuted and Indonesia's laws enforced, or we will lose them forever.

**For further information or comment please contact:**

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