Monitoring Orang-utan Reintroduction in Indonesia

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Abstract

Reintroduction raises public awareness, increases donor support, relieves welfare issues for ex-captive orang-utans and, perhaps most significantly, boosts the number and distribution of remaining populations. Monitoring this conservation strategy for orangutans however, has suffered historically from a lack of coherent documentation, limiting the ability to evaluate, assess, and support this conservation strategy.

The goal of this project was to increase the capacity for monitoring rehabilitant orang-utans after release to the forest in Indonesia. The project was used to initiate a comprehensive study of rehabilitant orang-utans behaviour and ecology within the current reintroduction framework; develop, apply, and assess monitoring techniques for orang-utan reintroductions to assist informed conservation decision-making; standardise data collection methods; conduct capacity building of Indonesian research assistants in collecting orang-utan behaviour data; and to demonstrate the reliable and empirical application of science for the successful conservation application of reintroduction. To date the project has been conducted on a population of reintroduced Sumatran orangutans' (*Pongo abelii*) in Indonesia and the second field site will be based on a population of reintroduced Bornean orangutans' (*Pongo pygmaeus*). Data-collection methods were tested for a 6-week period from March-April 2009 at another facility for orang-utans which enabled a detailed ethogram and protocols to be developed prior to the study. Focal observations occur at 1-minute intervals and are conducted for full-day follows. Whilst there is substantial scope for improving monitoring methods and the accuracy of which behaviours of the reintroduced orangutans' are measured, training staff in this capacity cannot guarantee its implementation without continual assessment and guidance. Given the limited number of reintroduction sites for orang-utans

developing means for better assessing the monitoring methods used after release is recommended and these should be transferable between field sites and between reintroduced populations of orang-utans. These measures of reintroduction outcomes are also being assessed in relation to rehabilitation techniques prior to release. The project is still ongoing for another year so final results will be available after full completion of the project.