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## Great Ape Trust Scientist in Sumatra to Count Orangutans

Des Moines, Iowa – May 30, 2007 – Great Ape Trust of Iowa visiting scientist Dr. Serge Wich is headed for the island of Sumatra in Indonesia for a 3 1/2-week study to more closely measure the orangutan population in a 700,000-hectare forest in Aceh, Sumatra's northern-most province and the area where most of the country's estimated 7,300 remaining orangutans are found.

Wich is participating in a biodiversity survey conducted by Fauna and Flora International, the world's oldest international conservation group and one of the few organizations in the world that works to protect the entire spectrum of endangered plant and animal species on the planet. Scientists from various disciplines will count orangutans, the only great ape found in Asia and one of the most endangered, as well as elephants, tigers, amphibians, birds, plants and trees.

To determine the orangutan population, scientists count nests and use a complex mathematical formula that takes into account the facts that orangutans in the wild make two nests daily, which can remain intact for a year, and that young orangutans do not make their own nests.

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The Aceh rain forest is of worldwide importance for biodiversity, providing habitat for quickly disappearing orangutans, the rare Sumatran tigers and elephants, as well as myriad other plant and animal species, including many that are yet to be identified. Illegal logging has accelerated at an alarming rate in the wake of tsunami reconstruction and the end of decades of hostilities in Indonesia as demand for palm oil surges. Palm oil is used in clean-burning biodiesel fuel, as well as for cooking and myriad food, cosmetic and household cleaning products.

The biodiversity study is being conducted to assist the government of Aceh, which has declared a moratorium on logging, in the development of a sustainable natural resource policy, Wich said. Forty percent of the money needed to fund palm oil plantations is generated by logging those forests, according to Wich.

“It’s very lucrative to log a forest and make a plantation instead of building it on degraded land,” he said.

A report earlier this year by the United Nation Environment Programme estimated that the natural rain forests of Sumatra and Borneo, the only other place in the world where orangutans are found in the wild, are being cleared so rapidly that up to 98 percent may be destroyed by 2022 without urgent action. According to the report, loss of orangutan habitat is occurring at a rate of up to 30 percent higher than previously thought.

Wich, a visiting scientist from Utrecht University in the Netherlands, was in Aceh in February and March to conduct an initial count of orangutans and is following up on that work during this visit. He has worked extensively in Sumatra, both at the well-established research site, Ketambe, where research into various aspects of orangutan behavior and ecology have been conducted since 1971.

Great Ape Trust financially supports conservation efforts in Sumatra and last year gave \$12,000 to fund a study at the Ketambe Research Center to determine the impact of illegal logging on orangutans. The Trust also supported the Sumatran Orangutan Conservation Programme, which has established a new orangutan research site in an area known as the West Batang Toru Forest Block in Sumatra. Also in Indonesia, The Trust funded the emergency relocation of five adult Bornean orangutans displaced by deforestation for establishment of palm oil plantations in Central

# NEWS RELEASE

Kalimantran. To find out more about Great Ape Trust involvement in these conservation efforts, visit [greatapetrust.org](http://greatapetrust.org).

In the past three years, Great Ape Trust has awarded \$170,644 for primate conservation efforts in Asia, Africa and South America.

## ***FAUNA AND FLORA INTERNATIONAL BACKGROUND***

About Fauna and Flora International: FFI was founded in 1903 as the Society for the Preservation of the Wild Fauna of the Empire by a group of British naturalists and American statesmen in Africa. The organization works to address the threats facing the variety of life on Earth, and has as one of its guiding principles the creation of a sustainable future for the planet where biodiversity is effectively conserved by the people who live closest to it and supported by the global community. For more information, go to [www.fauna-flora.org](http://www.fauna-flora.org).

## ***GREAT APE TRUST BACKGROUND***

Great Ape Trust of Iowa is a scientific research facility in southeast Des Moines dedicated to understanding the origins and future of culture, language, tools and intelligence. When completed, Great Ape Trust will be the largest great ape facility in North America and one of the first worldwide to include all four types of great ape – bonobos, chimpanzees, gorillas and orangutans – for noninvasive interdisciplinary studies of their cognitive and communicative capabilities.

Great Ape Trust is dedicated to providing sanctuary and an honorable life for great apes, studying the intelligence of great apes, advancing conservation of great apes and providing unique educational experiences about great apes. Great Ape Trust of Iowa is a 501(c) 3 not-for-profit organization and is certified by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA).

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**Insights Through Collaborations with Apes**