



For more information, contact:

Al Setka
Director of Communications
Great Ape Trust of Iowa
515.243.3580
515.720.7430 (mobile)
asetka@greatapetrust.org

Great Ape Trust scientists to present at historic orangutan workshop

*Conservationists, zoo officials join in unusual alliance
addressing the dwindling population of Asia's only great ape*

Des Moines, Iowa – October 12, 2007 – Three Great Ape Trust of Iowa scientists are among the internationally recognized orangutan experts invited to speak next week when a large group of professionals working with orangutans living in zoos, reintroduction programs and the wild gather in Chicago.

Great Ape Trust of Iowa visiting scientist and internationally renowned orangutan researcher [Dr. Serge Wich](#) will be the keynote speaker at the first-ever National Orangutan Husbandry Workshop to be held Oct. 16-18 at the Chicago Zoological Society's Brookfield Zoo. The conference, which Great Ape Trust is co-sponsoring, marks the first time The Orangutan Conservancy, a well-known international orangutan conservation organization, has partnered with zoological institutions in an attempt to save orangutans in the wild.

Other members of the Great Ape Trust scientific research team will be featured at the conference as well. Director of Orangutan Research [Dr. Rob Shumaker](#) will conduct a plenary session and [Dr. Karyl Swartz](#) will give a presentation on her memory research with orangutans. Additionally, orangutan caretakers [Andy Antilla](#) and Tine

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Geurts will provide a presentation on the recovery of [Allie](#), an adolescent orangutan who suffered an unknown neurological event at the Denver Zoo and was transferred to Great Ape Trust in 2005, where she has adapted extremely well to the vertical structure and has devised new ways to locomote and solve problems.

In general, presenters will offer strategies of social management of captive orangutans, as well as promote public awareness of the challenges the (critically) endangered ape faces in the wild. Orangutans in the wild are solitary or semi-solitary and require specialized management strategies to ensure they can thrive in zoos.

Shumaker said the workshop is “clearly an important event for the future of orangutans.”

“The workshop at the Brookfield Zoo will provide an important forum for discussion of orangutan welfare in captivity and conservation in the wild,” said Shumaker, who serves as vice chair of the orangutan group of the Species Survival Plan, a multi-zoo management and conservation program administered by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. “Dedicated professionals who care deeply about orangutans will meet to share their expertise and learn from each other.”

“I think that the workshop will provide a unique opportunity for people working with orangutans living in zoos, reintroduction programs and the wild to come together to share expertise and ideas that will hopefully be beneficial for orangutans everywhere,” said Wich, a visiting scientist at Great Ape Trust who has extensively studied orangutans in Sumatra (Indonesia), where all of the remaining 6,700 critically endangered *Pongo abelii* are found in the wild.”

Wich has been research program co-manager for the Ketambe Research Station there since 1997; is a member of the IUCN/SSC Great Ape Group, a joint collaboration of the World Conservation Union and Species Survival Commission which produces the [IUCN Red List of Threatened Species](#); and has published prolifically on such topics as orangutan conservation challenges and strategies, ecology and behavior.

Though the SSP Husbandry Workshop will focus on the care and management of orangutans in zoos, the conference will also recognize a landmark alliance among field biologists, sanctuary workers, zoo personnel and conservationists who share a commitment to orangutan conservation. Norm Rosen, president of the Orangutan

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Conservancy and a member of the Conservation Breeding Specialists Group of the IUCN/SSC, sees the gathering as an opportunity to combine resources and launch a groundbreaking conservation initiative calling for the development of a coalition of zoo personnel, field biologists and conservationists across America, Europe and Asia.

“If there is a problem with such urgency as the orangutan crisis, then why not marry ourselves in alliance with zoos?” Rosen explained. “I want to see zoos and conservation leaders across the country – and world – working together to tackle the issue head-on.”

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). To learn more about Great Ape Trust of Iowa, go to www.GreatApeTrust.org.

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Insights Through Collaborations with Apes