Bound by 98% DNA - The Day Karmele met JoJo started a journey which has saved Hundreds of Orangutans

Monday 1 September, 2025

On International Primate Day (September 1, 2025), International Animal Rescue shared this story, which highlights the profound connection and shared DNA between humans and primates. Orangutans share around 98% of our DNA and a bond that transcends species and speaks to our shared emotions, intelligence, and capacity for love.

For Dr. Karmele Llano Sánchez, that connection became heartbreakingly real in 2009, when she met JoJo, an orangutan chained in a backyard in West Kalimantan. **Malnourished, crippled by rickets, and fighting pneumonia, JoJo's world was just 30 centimetres wide.**

"It was one of the hardest days of my life," Karmele, YIARI's CEO, remembers the day she first saw him. **"*All I could do was clean his wounds and move the chain to his other leg, because at that time, there was no orangutan rescue facility in West Kalimantan. I had to leave JoJo there because we had no other choice. I had to leave him there. That moment changed everything."***

One day, one connection set off a chain of compassion that has since saved hundreds of orangutans.

Determined that no orangutan should suffer as JoJo had, Karmele and her team founded the West Kalimantan Orangutan Rescue Centre in 2010 with YIARI, the West Kalimantan BKSDA, and support from International Animal Rescue UK.

Fifteen years later, JoJo, now over 25 years old, is finally feeling the forest once more. Thanks to a newly built two-hectare forest enclosure for orangutans with lifelong injuries or health problems, JoJo can climb trees, breathe in forest air, and experience dignity and freedom at last.

He may never return to the wild, but his journey from chains to canopy has inspired a movement that has rescued and rehabilitated hundreds more orangutans, many of whom have been successfully released back to the wild.

Why Does Primate Day Matter?

- Orangutans are critically endangered.
- 60% of the world's primate species are threatened with extinction.
- 75% are already in decline, victims of habitat destruction, hunting, and the illegal pet trade.
- Primates are vital to tropical ecosystems, playing a crucial role in seed dispersal and forest regeneration. Without them, forests and the future of our planet are at risk.

JoJo's story is proof that one connection, one act of compassion, can change the future, not only for one life, but for hundreds more.

This Primate Day, we ask you to stand with JoJo and adopt an orangutan. Fund their care. Protect their forests.

Because 98% of our DNA may be the same, but 100% of their survival depends on us.

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