

Explorers against Extinction to shine a light on the plight of world's rarest great ape

Friday 14 June, 2019

Conservationists estimate that only around 800 **Tapanuli Orangutans** remain, making them the most endangered of the great apes, our closest cousins. The Tapanuli face extinction unless their habitat in Batang Toru, Sumatra can be saved from a \$1.6 billion US dam and power plant development.

UK based conservation charity **Explorers against Extinction (EAE)** is joining forces with **The Ape Alliance** in 2019, an international coalition of organisations and individuals, working for the conservation and welfare of apes, to try and help save the Tapanuli from extinction.

Sara White, EAE Trustee says: "Collaboration in conservation is key. We have the perfect platform through our UK network and series of autumn events and exhibitions to help raise significant awareness about the plight of the Tapanuli. The Ape Alliance is doing such vital work to safeguard the Tapanuli's habitat - we want to do all we can to support them."

Ian Redmond, OBE and chair of The Ape Alliance, explains: "The Tapanuli's survival depends on the connectivity of their populations, and so the Ape Alliance is supporting Indonesian conservationists to oppose the building of a hydro-electric dam that would flood the core part of their habitat and further divide the forests with roads and powerlines."

The Tapanuli orangutan was first described as a distinct, third, species of orangutan in 2017. The remaining 800 individuals are divided into three populations surrounding the Batang Toru river in the forests of Northern Sumatra - a 420-square-mile area and one of the most bio-diverse areas in Sumatra.

The dam is being built on the most critical area of Tapanuli orangutan habitat, with the highest density of individuals. The construction of roads and other man-made infrastructure will fragment the Tapanuli's fragile populations further, by forming impenetrable barriers for this exclusively arboreal (tree-dwelling) species.

White says: "Swift action is critical. Aerial photography already shows large swathes of rainforest have been cleared for the dam development. The dam threatens not only the Tapanuli orangutan but an entire ecosystem – one of the most bio diverse in Sumatra and home to other critically endangered species including Sumatran tiger and Sunda pangolin."

Events planned for the autumn include EAE's hugely popular touring wildlife art exhibition, **Sketch for Survival**. Ian Redmond from The Ape Alliance will headline EAE's 'On the Edge' event at the **Royal Geographical Society** in London on 14 November. The fund-raising evening, a celebration of travel and wildlife, will feature a number of special guests including species experts representing frontline conservation projects supported by EAE 2019.

Tickets £15+; Bookings open 1 September 2019.

For more information please contact Sara White, EAE Trustee at sara@explorersagainstextinction.co.uk

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About Explorers against Extinction

Explorers against Extinction is a wildlife conservation campaign organised by registered UK charity the Real World Conservation Trust (UK charity No 1177505).

The primary aims of the campaign are to raise awareness about the threats facing the world's most iconic species and their habitats while also raising significant funds for nominated projects pivotal in the battle to protect them. They aim to ignite a passion for responsible travel and conservation and to connect with 'everyday explorers' who want to safeguard wildlife and wild spaces for future generations.

Patrons include Sir Ranulph Fiennes, Col John Blashford Snell, Benedict Allen, Levison Wood and Pip Stewart.

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Ian Redmond OBE

Ian Redmond is a tropical field biologist and conservationist, renowned for his work with great apes and elephants. For more than 35 years he has been associated with Mountain Gorillas, through research, filming, tourism and conservation work. He was mentored by the late Dian Fossey and introduced Sir David Attenborough to the gorillas of Rwanda and Zaire in 1978, for the famous BBC 'Life on Earth' sequences. Ian even taught Sigourney Weaver to grunt like a gorilla in 1987, for her award-winning role in the film 'Gorillas in the Mist.' He has served as Ambassador for the UN Year of the Gorilla in 2009 and for the UNEP Convention on Migratory Species since 2010. As the chair of The Ape Alliance he is currently campaigning to save the critically endangered Tapanuli Orangutan in Sumatra, a project supported by Explorers against Extinction 2019.

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