

KING OF THE SWINGERS

NG KiDS hangs out with orangutans in Sabah, Malaysian Borneo...



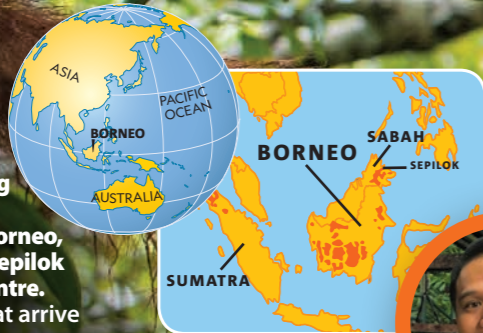
It's absolutely chucking it down and NG KiDS is getting soaked. We're in the steamy Kabili-Sepilok rainforest in Borneo, Southeast Asia, visiting the Sepilok Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre.

Most of the orangutans that arrive at Sepilok are **rescued orphans**. Some have lost their mums and homes due to **deforestation**. Others have been **illegally caught and kept as pets**. But they've been brought here to **learn how to survive in the wild**.

Learning the ropes

"Orangutan babies stay with their mums for **7-8 years** in the wild," explains our guide, **Gary Solacito**. "During that time they're taught all the skills they need to survive in the forest, such as **nest-building**, finding the **best fruits to eat** and **climbing** – because

orangutans spend most of their lives in the **treetops**."



It's Gary!

Best buds

To help the orphans learn survival skills, Sepilok has a brilliant **buddy scheme**! Older orphans befriend newbies, transferring the skills they've already learned. Baby orphans play in an **Indoor Nursery** where they meet and interact with other little apes. Then, when they're about four, they move to a specially designed outdoor playground where they practise climbing and swinging!

Built to climb

Orangutans' bodies are perfectly suited to life in the trees. Their **massive, strong arms**, measuring up to **2m in length**, help them reach tree branches, allowing them to swing (known as **brachiation**) from branch to branch. **Long curved fingers** and **toes** help them **grip fruit and tools**, and **climb trees** – some have been recorded climbing more than **40m up**!

Into the forest

"Once the orphans are about **7-8 years old**, they'll have learned enough survival skills to begin life in the **forest** surrounding the centre," explains Gary. The orangutans in the **43km²** forest are **free to wander** where they like, but they'll continue to **learn** from their elders. They find food themselves and sleep high up in the trees, building **new nests** in the canopy **every day** (left).

Orangutans make nests by folding branches and lining them with leaves – comfy!

Orangutans are the **world's largest tree-climbing mammals**!

"Older orangutans may disappear into the forest for many years before turning up again!" says Gary.

Snack time

We head to the reserve's **forest feeding station**, where rangers leave out **bananas** and **long beans** twice a day. The team deliberately keep the diet **bland** to encourage the apes to go off and find more interesting meals such as **figs, mangosteens, durian fruit, jackfruit** and **rambutans** growing wild in the forest. Orangutans also eat young **leaves, insects**, small **animals** and even **tree bark**.

"There's no **guarantee** we'll see orangutans at the feeding platform today," says Gary. "But that's actually a good thing – if they don't turn up it means there's **plenty of fruit** for them to eat in the forest, and that their rehabilitation is going well!"

Dominant males have large **flanges** on their faces – these help them make loud **long calls** which attract females from across the forest.



The name '**orangutan**' means '**person of the forest**' in the Malay language.

Orangutans are top **tool makers**! They use **leaves** as **umbrellas** to shelter from the rain, and sticks to scoop insects out of holes. Some have even been seen **spearing fish** in rivers!



Waiting game

We watch the trees, wondering whether today will be one of those bitter-sweet days. But soon we hear a **rustling** in the trees. A mother orangutan swings down from a branch onto the platform, her **baby, born at the centre**, clutching her chest. Mum sits there, munching, while the youngster nestles into her round hairy body. Then a **long, thin arm** stretches out and takes a banana. The baby starts snacking, too (below).



Time for tea!

Just keep looking

The urge to reach out and touch the beautiful pair is overwhelming! But Gary quickly puts us straight. "Visitors must never touch the orangutans," he warns. "Humans and orangutans can share illnesses such as **flu** and **tummy bugs**. Tourists also use **mosquito repellent** and **suntan lotion**, **chemicals** that are bad for the apes." So we simply watch, in awe, as the pair feed together in the rain.

Hope for the future?

Sadly, orangutans are now **Critically Endangered** due to **deforestation** and the **illegal pet trade** – just **71,820** remain in the wild, **57,350** of them in **Borneo**. The remainder are on the **Indonesian** island of **Sumatra**. But, thanks to centres like **Sepilok**, **forest conservation** and better **public education** about orangutans' plight, it's hoped that the future for these majestic apes will soon be looking a little brighter.

NG KIDS flew to Sabah in Borneo courtesy of **Royal Brunei Airlines** (flyroyalbrunei.com). We stayed at the **Shangri-La's Rasa Ria Resort & Spa** near Kota Kinabalu (shangri-la.com/kotakinabalu/rasariareort). With thanks to **sabahtourism.com** and **borneosandakantours.com** for providing the trip to Sepilok. To read more about the rehabilitation centre and find out how you can help orangutans, head to orangutan-appeal.org.uk