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A female Sumatran orangutan (*Pongo abelii*) photographed at Gladys Porter Zoo in Brownsville, Texas

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOEL SARTORE, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC PHOTO ARK

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# Orangutans



**COMMON NAME:** Orangutans

**SCIENTIFIC NAME:** *Pongo*

**TYPE:** Mammals

**DIET:** Omnivore

**AVERAGE LIFE SPAN IN THE WILD:** 30 to 40 years

**SIZE:** Standing height: 4 to 5 feet

**WEIGHT:** 73 to 180 pounds

**SIZE RELATIVE TO A 6-FT MAN:**



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The Malay word orangutan means “person of the forest.” These long-haired, orangish primates, found only in Sumatra and Borneo, are highly intelligent and are close relatives of humans.

## Size

Orangutans have an enormous arm span. A male may stretch his arms some 7 feet from fingertip to fingertip—a reach considerably longer than his standing height of about 5 feet. When orangutans do stand, their hands nearly touch the ground.

## Life in the Trees

Orangutans' arms are well suited to their lifestyle because they spend much of their time (some 90 percent) in the trees of their tropical rain forest home. They even sleep aloft in nests of leafy branches. They use large leaves as umbrellas and shelters to protect themselves from the common rains.

## Diet

These cerebral primates forage for food during daylight hours. Most of their diet consists of fruit and leaves gathered from rain forest trees. They also eat bark, insects and, on rare occasions, meat.

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## Solitary Behavior

Orangutans are more solitary than other apes. Males are loners. As they move through the forest they make plenty of rumbling, howling calls to ensure that they stay out of each other's way. The “long call” can be heard 1.2 miles away.

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eight years—the longest time period of any animal. The animals are long-lived and have survived as long as 60 years in captivity.

## Threats to Survival

Because orangutans live in only a few places, and because they are so dependent upon trees, they are particularly susceptible to logging in these areas. Unfortunately, deforestation and other human activities, such as hunting, have placed the orangutan in danger of extinction.



### WATCH: TIL ORANGUTANS BUILD COMFY NESTS TO SLEEP IN

Whether for a quick nap or a full night's sleep, orangutans build treetop nests to bed down in. These master engineers design for stability, but also comfort—some even fashion blankets and pillows. Orangutans build new nests every day, so it's fortunate they can whip one u...[Read More](#)

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