



courtesy COP/Hardi Baktiantoro

an oil palm plantation, with the cut wood turning a quick profit for the

asked the Centre for Orangutan Protection (COP; www.orangutanprotection.com), for help. In June, COP conducted a biodiversity survey in the remaining forest; the ensuing report showed a very dense population of orangutans in the Cempaga forest.

According to Pantis Pandelum's Cristoffel, less than 30 orangutan individuals used to live in the forest area, but the population appeared to have doubled due to habitat loss in the surrounding areas, with forests replaced by oil palm plantations.

Orangutans only live on Borneo and Sumatra, and are estimated to become extinct in the wild within 10 years, joining many other lesser known species.

The COP team also found endangered langurs, gibbons, deer, crocodiles, Sun bears, dozens of endangered bird species as well as butterflies and other insects.

COP director Hardi Baktiantoro recalled a June 16 interaction with the security manager of NKU, Abdul Hadi Bondoh, who "asked if we were interested in obtaining orangutans for sale".

In the field, he added, a bulldozer driver said "there were some problems with local people, but that this wouldn't stop their activities, 'as long as this case is in government hands'".

"This way, the responsibility is being thrown from one party to another and meanwhile, PT NKU will continue clearing the land," Hardi said.

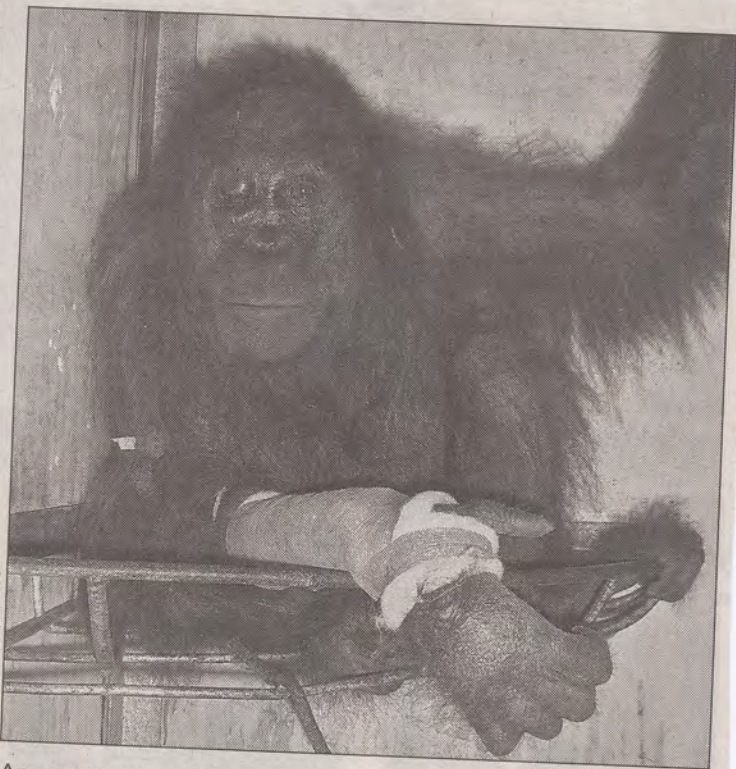
The government is planning a huge increase in the number of oil palm plantations to create employment and national revenue, but seems to be optimistic about the issue.

Bloomberg.com quoted State Minister of the Environment Rachmat Nadi Witoelar Kartaadipoetra as saying during a June 5 interview in Bali:



courtesy COP

COP director, Hardi Baktiantoro pauses while photographing a bulldozer of Nabatindo Karia Utama as it clears primary rainforest to make way for an oil palm plantation. Indonesia possesses 18 million hectares of already degraded land readily available for such plantations.



J/Pfemike van den Bos

An orangutan, with numerous injuries it has suffered at the hands of oil palm plantation employees, is photographed at a rescue center in Nyaru Menteng, Palangkaraya, Central Kalimantan. Nyaru Menteng is currently home to 600 orangutans rescued from oil palm plantations and the illegal wildlife trade.

"Expansion of oil palm plantations will not be allowed to sacrifice natural forests.

"They will be planted in lots that are already empty. There are plenty of these, 18 million hectares of them."

The writer is a veterinarian at Monkey World, a primate rescue center in Dorset, United Kingdom. She worked as a wildlife veterinarian in Indonesia from 2004-2006, and is Europe spokesperson for COP.