

Indonesian wildlife trade, or how can we help?

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Wildlife trade is widely listed as one of main threats faced by populations of an ever-increasing number of species. In spite of all legal efforts undertaken by countries of origin as well as the global conservation community through e.g. the CITES Convention, there is no significant global downward trend in trade. Some local success that is achieved in a number of countries is usually followed by upward trends in other. During autumn 2005, the author had an opportunity to visit some rescue centres in Indonesia as well as animal markets. Although the survey was not performed in a systematic way, it gave a good general impression of the scope of the problem in that country. Indonesia is one of the most important "animal trade hotspots" globally. The reasons for that are:

- very high biodiversity.
- presence of a multitude of species considered attractive for the internal and external trade.
- long established tradition of animal trade.
- poor law enforcement.
- widespread poverty.
- pressure from external pet-trade.

In spite of efforts from national and international organisations to curb the trade, there seems to be not much success. Just the most "charismatic" species like orang-utans (*Pongo pygmaeus*) or birds of paradise are no longer traded openly. However difficult and marginal that might be, the confiscations of the animals in trade still go on. They are usually forced by international welfare or conservation organisations based in Indonesia, with local authorities not taking a leading role in such ventures. Even with this low intensity of confiscations (the markets visited in November were full of animals listed as protected and not allowed to be traded) the numbers are undoubtedly huge. Although there is no central database on the animals kept in Indonesian rescue/confiscation centres, brief visits to a few such centres (as well as zoos) gave some impression on the scope of the problem.

The first centre called Cikananga is located in central Java and cares for all groups of animals. Although no current stock list was available the staff informed that at the moment of my visit there were some 20,000 animals under its care. The stock consisted of all possible groups with plenty of reptiles (mostly tortoises, turtles and crocodiles), various birds, dominated by parrots, birds of prey and cassowaries; and mammals: mostly primates but also a tiger (*Panthera tigris*), Asiatic golden cat (*Catopuma temminckii*) and viverrids. The animals were properly cared for, and overcrowding appears to take its toll on animals. There is hardly any more room to accommodate additional animals, and new cages are being built continuously. There is a very good and functional veterinary facility as well as accommodation for staff and visitors (volunteers).

The second place visited was the orang-utan Rescue Centre in Wanariset (Borneo). It is administered by the Dutch Foundation "BOS" and cares for about 300 orang-utans of Bornean origin. Recently, a large area of highly degraded forest had been acquired and a new centre is being developed there with a strong emphasis on environmental education in future. At this site there was a number of new paddocks holding 50+ Malayan sun bears (*Helarctos malayanus*). The paddocks were very spacious with a lot of natural (low) vegetation. Unfortunately the adult males could not be kept with the females and were held in tiny cages.

The Schmutz Primate Centre is located within the Ragunan (Jakarta) Zoo and represents a world-class institution. It is run mostly by expat staff and lead by Dutchman Willie Smit. It holds an impressive collection of Indonesian primates as well as some exotic species. All primate

accommodation is very good, as is the standard of care. The newly built facilities for nocturnal primates and macaques would fit any leading zoo. Schmutzler is however not a classical rescue station but goes well beyond that. It is an excellent base for conservation breeding, education and research. To fully develop its potential the Schmutzler Centre needs to cooperate more closely with the rest of the world.

The Indonesian zoos visited also held a huge number of confiscated animals. Especially Ragunan zoo had a lot of confiscated primates and birds in quite primitive off-show facilities. A most impressive collection of well over 50 cassowaries of all possible species, subspecies and forms, unique for its possibility to contribute to valuable genetic research into the variability of the species involved, was also held there.

Other zoos like Surabaya, Taman Safari, Bali zoo, and various reptile, bird and crocodile parks also held lower numbers of confiscated animals.

The overall picture in my opinion looks as follows:

- the wildlife trade in Indonesia continues, in spite of all efforts of governmental and non-governmental organizations.
- the total number of animals kept in rescue stations and zoos remain unknown and undocumented, but according to most reliable sources may exceed 100,000 individuals. more confiscations will result in serious overcrowding of existing facilities and put additional risks on the existing stock.
- there are no long-term plans for the rescue centres and some species of no conservation value are allowed to breed freely.
- there are no coordinated breeding programs even for the most threatened species; the Javan hawk eagle (*Spizaetus bartelsi*) for example is kept in at least six institutions, but all individuals are kept singly.
- there is no feasible plan to reintroduce most of the stock due to lack of knowledge of the exact origin of animals, lack of funding, insufficient protection in natural habitats as well as lack of expertise in this field.
- the rescue centres depend heavily on external funding and are not sufficiently supported by the government.

Is it an acceptable situation for the international zoo community that some of the most threatened species, whose survival may depend on captive breeding in the near future, are kept in numbers under sometimes unacceptable conditions and not managed, while at the same time we have to abandon an EEP programme due to a lack of founders? Such an example is the silvery gibbon (*Hyalobates moloch*): the EEP was malfunctioning and therefore incorporated into the International studbook, due to a lack of animals and an insufficient founder base. At the same time there are tens, if not hundreds, of this species held in numerous localities all around Indonesia.

So, what we can do as European zoo community to help? As the problem is a massive one, the approach must also be significant. Individual approaches by single zoos will probably not make much difference. As a first step I would like to propose forming a working group within EAZA institutions interested particularly in Indonesian fauna. Such a group would then establish links with relevant institutions in Indonesia as well as responsible governmental agencies there, and identify possible target species as well as fields for cooperation. Then, working through individual zoos, or concentrated funds we can really make a difference.

I would also like to propose one of the future EAZA campaigns to concentrate on Indonesia, one of the most important and somehow neglected biodiversity hotspots on the earth.