

# The Intelligent Orangutan

Name Answer Key

by Gigi Finn

**Orangutans** are an extremely intelligent, critically endangered type of great ape. They are arboreal- they live in trees- and just like humans, they know how to make and use tools.



Orangutan means “forest person” in Malaysian. However, this isn’t the only way they are like humans. Orangutans in captivity seem to like watching movies and music videos. They also enjoy perfume, and some use an app called “Tinder for Orangutans” to find their mates. A few orangutans have even learned sign language and can communicate well with their keepers.

In the wild, orangutans live only on the East Asian islands of Borneo and Sumatra, in lush, tropical rainforest. These wild populations are our main concern. They are frugivorous- they eat mostly fruit- and they build nests to sleep in at night. Orangutan mothers have the longest parenthood of all great apes except humans; male babies stay with their mothers until they are seven or eight, and females until eleven, so that they can watch their mother bring up their younger sibling. At about 15 years of age, males begin to develop cheek pouches for “long calls” and females may have their first baby. Females generally have three or four babies in their lifetime.



These “red apes” use tools for many purposes- branches and leaves can become makeshift umbrellas and sticks can be used to collect unreachable items, fend off bees, and even as backscratchers. There is even a story of a mother orangutan “borrowing” a canoe to enjoy some blossoms downriver with her son. Orangutans will, over time, learn to copy what humans do, as seen at rehabilitation centers, where they have been known to use soap and untie knots.

Because baby orangutans are so cute, locals often capture babies to sell as pets on the black market. Babies need their mothers and often do not survive being held captive. Efforts on the part of organizations like the Orangutan Foundation International find these babies and take them to rehabilitation centers, where they learn to survive and eventually are released back into the wild.

The pet trade is not the only problem orangutans face. Their habitat is also being destroyed for pulp-and-paper development, logging, and palm oil plantations. We should all help save these incredible primates and their habitat. After all, we share 96% DNA! 🐼

## Questions

Where do orangutans live? In rainforest on the East Asian islands of Sumatra and Borneo

What do orangutans eat? Mostly fruit

What does the word orangutan mean? Forest person

Why do orangutans need help? We are destroying their home for pulp-and-paper, logging, and oil palm plantations.

Why do you think we should save orangutans? Answers vary

