

Orangutans killed for meat in Kalimantan

A report says 691 Borneo orangutans were slaughtered in Kalimantan – most of whom were eaten by residents.

The great apes were killed for several reasons, Suci Utami Atmoko, a field coordinator for report co-author The Nature Conservancy (TNC), said on Tuesday.

“Some [residents] were desperate and had no other choice after spending three days hunting for food,” she said.

Local residents also killed the orangutans for safety reasons, Suci said, harvesting orangutan meat to make traditional medicine and selling any surviving orangutan babies.

The Nature Conservancy led the survey, which was conducted between April 2008 and September 2009 and involved 6,972 respondents in 698 villages across Kalimantan.

Nineteen NGOs joined the survey, including the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the People’s Resource and Conservation Foundation Indonesia (PRCFI) and the Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation (BOSF).

TNC program manager Neil Makinuddin said 70 percent of the respondents knew that orangutans were a protected and endangered species when they hunted the animals.

Decisions to open land in Kalimantan to development have not considered orangutans, leading to the destruction of their habitat, Neil said.

“We must soon open conservation areas for orangutans or their population will become extinct,” he said, adding that the government should punish orangutan killers.

Erik Meijaard, forest director of People and Nature Consulting International, said Kalimantan’s orangutans would become extinct if 1 percent of female orangutans were killed in a year. “Uncontrolled killing will soon diminish their population.”

Forestry Ministry species conservation chief Agus SB Sutito said the ministry had yet to receive reports about the rapid killing of orangutans in Kalimantan.

“We gladly welcome the results of the survey,” he said. “The ministry will work harder to enforce the law.”

There were currently 40,000 to 65,000 orangutans in Kalimantan, although the number was rapidly decreasing due to habitat loss, according to the WWF.

The government previously set a target of raising the populations of 14 endangered species, including orangutans, by up to 3 percent by 2020. (msa)