

## Residents object to orangutan survey

Locals say that a recent survey, which reveals that most of the 691 slaughtered Borneo orangutans were eaten by residents, is out of context and misses the core issue. Margareta Seting Beraan, of East Kalimantan, said the survey seemed to accuse the locals of harming the environment and endangering animals.

"We Dayaks are so disappointed with the report because it seems to discredit us. The report fails to understand the real forestry problems in Indonesia, particularly in Kalimantan," she said.

Margareta said orangutans were losing their habitat and thus occupying villages and harming people.

"We never harm orangutans unless we are forced to defend ourselves. The report should have highlighted the fact that orangutans are losing their habitat because more land is being cleared for plantations and mining companies," she said.

A consortium of 19 NGOs led by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) conducted the survey from April 2008 to September 2009 to study perceptions of orangutans and efforts to conserve the animals, questioning 6,972 respondents in 698 villages across Kalimantan.

The report said that 54 percent of the 691 Borneo orangutans killed during the 17-month study were consumed by residents, while others were used for traditional medicine. According to the survey, orangutans are also killed to trade the babies for pets. The survey shows that 70 percent of respondents are aware that orangutans are a protected species.

April Perlindungan, a member of the Dayak Ngaju tribe in Central Kalimantan, also questioned the result of the survey.

"The locals will never intentionally kill orangutans because the animals reside in the sacred pahewan zone of the forest. People are prohibited to touch anything in that part of the forest. The orangutans that are killed must be those outside that forest. I can guarantee that locals only harmed the animals to protect themselves," April said.

According to Dayak Ngaju law, the forest is divided into three different zones: the sacred pahewan zone where rituals are held, the saphean zone for hunting animals or collecting rubber and the kaleka zone for farming.

April also said that their ancestors taught traditional methods of expelling orangutans from villages without harming them.

"Just burn eggplants in the forest, and I assure you that the animals will follow the scent," he told The Jakarta Post, adding that knowing the trick, locals could easily trap and kill orangutans if they wanted to.

The Indonesian Forum for the Environment (WALHI) campaign manager Deddy Ratih told the Post that the study should have provided deeper insight into the causes of the conflict between locals and orangutans in Kalimantan instead of highlighting the fact that orangutans were eaten.

"The conflict is the result of clearing land for oil palm plantations and mining, which forces orangutans to leave their habitat. The core problem is that humans have damaged the forest and the animals in it," he said, suggesting that the survey should have pointed the finger to the government and plantations and mining companies that were responsible for decreasing the orangutans' habitat.

TNC previously presented the survey's findings at a press briefing, telling reporters that the orangutans were not killed intentionally.

The study found that some residents hunted orangutans because they had no choice after spending three days in the forest, while others killed them in self-defense. (msa)