

# Dr. Biruté Mary Galdikas Celebrates 50 Years in the Field

*World's Foremost Authority on Orangutans Draws Attention to Plight of Critically Endangered Species during Orangutan Awareness Month*

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, USA, November 8, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- On November 6, 2021, anthropologist, conservationist, scientist and primatologist [Dr. Biruté Mary Galdikas](#) will mark the 50th anniversary of the day that she made camp in the jungle of Borneo, Indonesia to begin her pioneering study of orangutans.

Dr. Galdikas established Camp Leakey as a base camp in the Borneo rainforest 50 years ago to study wild orangutans. Since then, she has carried out ground-breaking research, is recognized as the world's foremost authority on orangutans and is credited with having conducted the longest continuous study of wild orangutans in the world.

The 50th anniversary coincides with Orangutan Awareness Month in November, which was created by [Orangutan Foundation International](#)

[\(OFI\)](#) to honour the establishment of Camp Leakey in Tanjung Puting National Park and to spread awareness about the plight of orangutans and encourage action to save them.



Conservationist, scientist and primatologist Dr. Biruté Galdikas marks the 50th anniversary of the day that she made camp in the jungle of Borneo, Indonesia



Trimates the late Dr. Dian Fossey, Dr. Jane Goodall and Dr. Biruté Galdikas

Camp Leakey was named after the paleoanthropologist Dr. Louis Leakey, who was a mentor to Dr. Galdikas, as well as to Dr. Jane Goodall (chimpanzees) and the late Dr. Dian Fossey (mountain gorillas), who he named the "Trimates". As a part of the "Trimates", Dr. Galdikas revolutionized the scientific method of primatology by completely immersing herself in the world's most inhospitable jungles for five decades to live amongst the orangutans.

"Orangutans are among the most intelligent beings to have evolved on land, and as individuals, they display unique and rich personalities," explains Dr. Galdikas. "They provide models for human behaviour, in terms of physiology, cognition and evolution. As great apes and one of humankind's closest living relatives, they deserve respect and life."

A leading voice in the fight against deforestation and for the strengthening of forest policy, Dr. Galdikas has dedicated her life to the conservation of wild orangutans and their rainforest habitat. Her ground-breaking discoveries include:

- oThe first to document the long orangutan birth interval which averages almost eight years in Tanjung Puting National Park.
- oRecorded over 400 types of food consumed by orangutans, providing unprecedented detail about orangutan feeding ecology (including fruits, leaves, stems, bark, insects, fungi and more.)
- oDocumented the adult male orangutans' iconic long call vocalizations.
- oObserved flanged adult males in combat, and even wild orangutans giving birth - making it the most complete record of wild orangutan behaviour ever recorded.
- oDocumented the incredible tool use and imitative abilities of free-ranging rehabilitant orangutans, providing an unprecedented understanding into orangutan and great ape cognition and intelligence.
- oHelped elucidate the nature of orangutan social organization and mating systems.

The primary threat to the survival of orangutan populations in the wild is the destruction and fragmentation of primary rainforests to make way for palm oil plantations. It is estimated that between 1,000 and 5,000 orangutans are killed every year because of palm oil development. Dr. Galdikas and OFI work closely with the Indonesian Ministry of Environment and Forestry to protect wild orangutans and their native rainforest habitat through land purchase, patrol teams and building local and international support coalitions.



Dr. Biruté Galdikas in jungle in Borneo, Indonesia

To protect important buffer habitat and build corridors to connect forests for all wildlife, OFI through its Forest Protection program has secured over 6,000 hectares (14,826 acres) of forest parcels as potential sites for the release of wild born, ex-captive orangutans, as well as to protect remnant wild orangutan populations.

Under Dr. Galdikas' leadership, and in partnership with the Indonesian Wildlife and Conservation Department, OFI has also established the Orangutan Care Centre and Quarantine (OCCQ) facility, which provides medical, parental and emotional care to ex-captive orphaned orangutans in preparation for their return into the wild. To date, more than 800 orphaned and ex-captive or ex-pet orangutans and rescued wild orangutans have been released. Currently, OCCQ provides medical treatment, rehabilitation and reintegration care for 285 orangutans.

Dr. Galdikas and OFI's next priority to assure protection of Tanjung Puting National Park is to work with Indonesian authorities and UNESCO to establish it as a World Heritage site. A unique geographical landmark, the Park is scientifically significant as it is the home to one of the largest wild orangutan populations in the world.

"Orangutans are the gardeners and guardians of the tropical rainforest, yet their homes are being destroyed," adds Dr. Galdikas. "The survival of the species requires immediate action and if we continue on this current rate of erosion, we are merely decades away from extinction. Essentially, if we save orangutans, we save ourselves."

Dr. Galdikas urges people around the world to work together to protect orangutans and their rainforest habitats by eliminating or consuming less palm oil, planting trees, and advocating for orangutan conservation by writing to government officials in Malaysia and Indonesia or by supporting organizations like OFI.

In recognition of her considerable achievements, Dr. Galdikas has received a host of awards including Indonesia's Hero for the Earth Award, Queen Elizabeth II Commemorative Medal and Jubilee Medal, Officer, Order of Canada, PETA Humanitarian Award, Sierra Club Chico Mendes Award, Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievement, and the United Nations Global 500 Award.

#### About Orangutan Foundation International

Orangutan Foundation International (OFI) is a non-profit organization dedicated to the conservation of wild orangutans and their rainforest habitat. OFI also supports research on orangutans and forests, education initiatives, both local and international, and brings awareness concerning orangutans wherever it can. To learn more, visit: [www.orangutan.org](http://www.orangutan.org), [www.orangutanfoundation.org.au](http://www.orangutanfoundation.org.au) <http://www.orangutancanada.ca/>

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