

Orangutan SSP Education and Conservation Survey Report February 2009

Submitted by
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Orangutans are increasingly endangered. The zoo community generally assumes that AZA zoos are responding to the crisis by stepping up their conservation messaging and education to change visitor behavior and attitudes. The Orangutan SSP wanted to find out if, indeed, zoos were improving their orangutan programs. We also wanted to see if we could facilitate greater networking and resource sharing. In the winter of 2008-09, zoos were asked to participate in an SSP Orangutan Education Survey.

Why education?

*Zoos in the 21st Century: Catalysts for Conservation?*ⁱ is the product of an international symposium hosted by the Zoological Society of London and the Wildlife Conservation Society. Authors of one of the chapters, Bengt Holst and Lesley Dickie, pointed out several methods by which zoos meet their conservation obligations. One of those activities is “conducting conservation education programmes leading to greater conservation awareness, and thereafter action, on the part of their visitors.”

In examining the rationale for conservation education, authors Eleanor Sterling, Jimin Lee and Tom Wood explained:

“The mission of many modern zoos is to advance conservation work, and in large part that means educating visitors, informing the public’s understanding of conservation matters, and inspiring meaningful changes in people’s attitudes and actions. Recent decades have seen the goal of educational programs redefined to emphasize behavior change in their target audiences, a resolve to better evaluate the success of educational initiatives, and a continuation of efforts to broaden the audience. This important transitional era for education in zoos and aquariums resembles the concurrent changes in our approach to education as a society.”

So, how are the educational programs for orangutans faring at our zoos? Sterling et al points out that “often zoo education programs focus mostly on raising awareness, hoping that behavior change will follow.” Are AZA zoos in the “hoping mode” for orangutan conservation and protection? Alternatively, do they have effective programs that raise knowledge AND inspire change in values, attitudes and behaviors?

The people who responded to the survey demonstrated commitment and a desire to improve their educational efforts, presenting a wide range of creative ideas. There might be cause for worry, however, in the fact that less than half of the AZA zoos with orangutans responded to the survey, despite its availability on keeper, educational and volunteer list serves as well as direct emails to the attendees of the 2nd Orangutan SSP Husbandry Workshop. On the other hand, the 43% response rate might illustrate a need for a shared virtual space, with free access to all zoo professionals and volunteers concerned with orangutan care, conservation and education.

Twenty-seven zoos responded to the survey. Of the 27 zoos, 23ⁱⁱ currently exhibit orangutans. This report focuses on the responses from those 23 zoos with orangutans. The most pertinent responses

from the four non-orangutan zoosⁱⁱⁱ were on the question of whether they support a “Year of the Orangutan,” and their answers are indicated in that section.

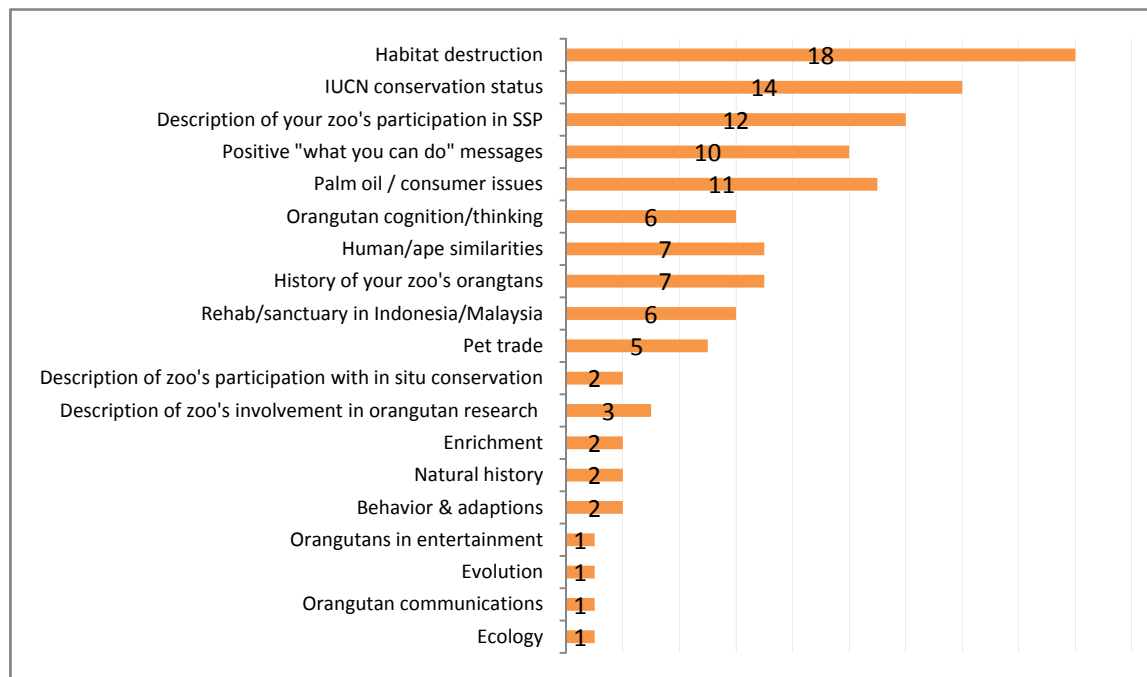
SURVEY RESULTS

The zoos report that most of their exhibits have been constructed or upgraded in the 1990s and 2000s. The zoo with the oldest non-updated exhibit area built their exhibit in the 1970s and had not upgraded since. A zoo that built its facility in the 1960s upgraded its areas in the 1990s and the 2000s. Three zoos with exhibits built in the 1980s have upgraded; the other stated that they have replaced poles, ropes and platforms over the years. Of the 11 zoos with orangutan exhibits constructed in the 1990s, three were upgraded in the 2000s. Five zoos have (or will have) exhibit facilities built during this decade.

	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s
Constructed w/ subsequent upgrades	1	1	3	3	
Constructed w/ no upgrades		1	1	8	5
Total construction	1	2	4	11	5

Q: Does your exhibit area provide information (i.e., signage, videos, touch screens) on orangutan issues?

Of the 23 zoos with orangutans, two do not currently provide information at the exhibit area, but it is in the zoos’ future plans. Messages covered by exhibit information:



Q: Does your zoo have an interpreter/docent program that covers orangutans?

Most of the zoos with orangutans also have interpreter/docent programs, with 78% (18 zoos) reporting programs. Of those, only one did not discuss conservation/protection issues with visitors, with one respondent not sure. All of the programs included exhibit discussions or chats, with six zoos also reporting that their program included general tours.

Some other interpreter/docent programs included a zoo mobile, touch tables, dress-up activities, crafts, “sign a t-shirt for orangutans,” orangutan natural behavior show, orangutan painting demonstration, enrichment demonstrations and behind-the-scenes tours.

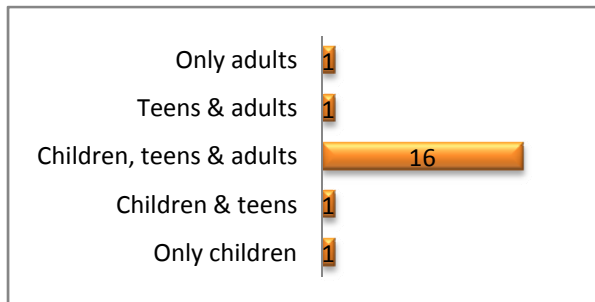
Q: Do your keepers conduct orangutan exhibit chats?

Less than quarter of the zoos do not have keeper chats. Of the 17 who do, two seem to chat only at special events.

Q: Do your keepers conduct food tosses for orangutans?

Fewer zoos did the food tosses, with only 48% (11) responding yes. One zoo indicated that they also did “enrichment tosses.” Another zoo did not do “tosses” but they had “food enrichment” activities like serving corn on the cob on the 4th of July and heart popsicles on Valentine’s Day.

Q: Does your zoo provide orangutan-themed classes/speeches/presentations?

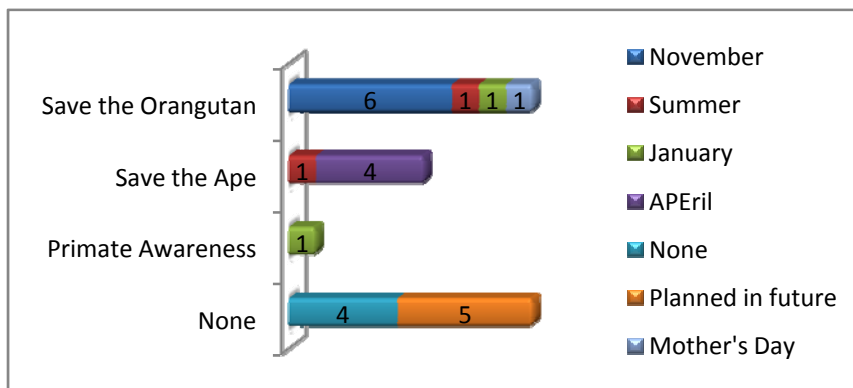


Twenty of the 23 zoos provide these educational activities (with one other indicating that orangutans are included in their rainforest programming). Most of them (16) said that they had activities appropriate for all age groups: children, teens and adults. One zoo geared their activities to adults, and another to teens and adults. Another zoo had activities only for children, and another for children and teens.

When do the 20 zoos offer their orangutan activities? There is a wide variety. Twelve zoos indicated that they held a special “orangutan awareness” event; of those, three indicated that the awareness event was the only activity they held. Fourteen zoos indicated that they offered activities at various times of the year. Thirteen said they offered the activities as part of specific education programs, but it is not clear whether these are additional events or if it describes the previously mentioned activities.

Q: Does your zoo hold a special “Save the Orangutan” or “Save the Apes” event?

Eight zoos hold a “save the orangutan” event (lasting a day, weekend, or week): six in November, one in the summer, one on Mother’s Day, one to celebrate a birthday in April. Five zoos hold a “save the apes”



event: one was in November but is moving to the summer, and four in APERil.

Additionally, one zoo holds a “Primate Awareness Month” in January, and celebrates an orangutan birthday on the 23rd. Nine of the 22 zoos (41%) do not hold a special event, but five of those indicate that they plan to hold one in the future. (One zoo holds two

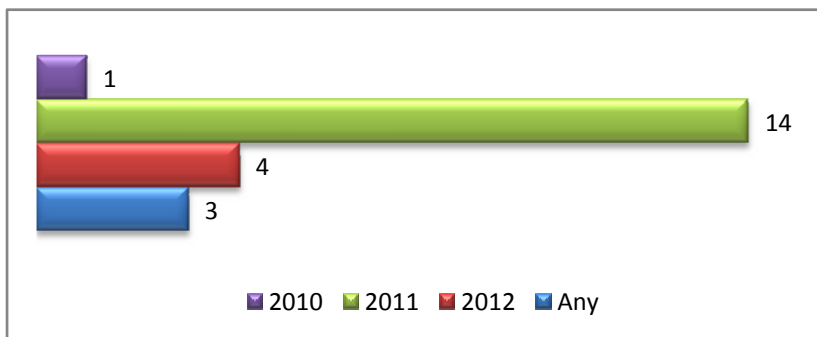
events: orangutan in November and ape in APERil.)

Q: Would you be willing to consider holding a “Save the Orangutan” event on a single day, common to all AZA institutions?

With an oft cited caveat that they would have to check with marketing departments or zoo management, twenty (87%) of the zoos with orangutans said yes. One said perhaps, and two did not answer. None said no.

Tens zoos (50%) preferred a warm month, with visitor attendance usually cited as the main reason, and three of the zoos said that any month was okay for them. A minority – seven zoos (35%) -- indicated that they preferred November as the month for the event. Of the ten preferring warm months, seven preferred August, one said June or July, one said April, and one said “summer.”

Q. The 2008 “Year of the Frog” was a tremendously successful effort in bringing attention to the issues. Would you favor an AZA “Year of the Orangutan?” If yes, which year? (Options were 2011, 2012, and 2013)



The answer was virtually unanimous. Of the 23 zoos with orangutans, 22 wanted a “Year of the Orangutan.” Most selected the earliest option provided.

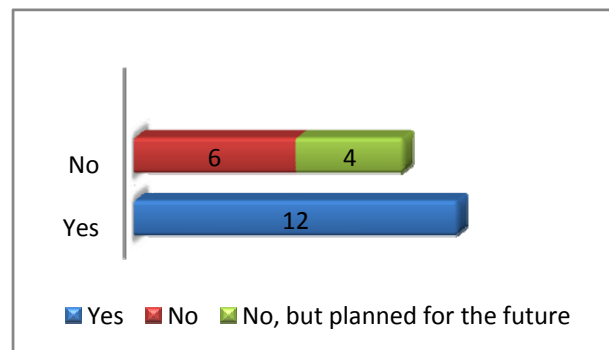
One zoo wasn’t sure, since not every zoo has orangutans the participation would be lower

than it was for frogs. None of the zoos with orangutans said no.

Four zoos that do not have orangutans participated in this survey. Of those, one zoo would favor a Year of the Orangutan, in 2011. Two supported a broader “Year of the Ape” – one wanted it in 2011, the other indicated any year. One did not respond to this question.

Q: Do you use handout materials in any of your orangutan programs?

Ten of the 22 zoos do not use handout materials, although four of them indicated that they plan to use them in the future. One zoo pointed out a problem: “Some of the info online is confusing, especially in discussing palm oil and the various orangutan conservation issues – so some clarification or AZA sanctioned info might be helpful.”



Q. What themes and/or materials are the most valuable parts of orangutan educational materials in zoos?

Zoos cited a wide range of themes for educational materials. Most fell into two major categories: threats to orangutans and facts about orangutans.

Threats to orangutans

Nine of the zoos specifically cited palm oil issues:

- We have a “six simple steps to help animals” brochure and one issue addressed is palm oil.
- Palm oil, FSC lumber – “what you can do” type things
- Palm oil product examples
- Info about palm oil crisis – lists of sustainable palm oil vendors
- Palm oil webpage, palm oil educational handout
- Education on palm oil crisis and other threats to orangutans
- Information about palm oil crisis and how habitat loss/destruction affects wildlife
- We think ape conservation, habitat restoration, and palm oil are some of the most important issues/themes we address/plan on addressing.
- Conservation, habitat destruction and palm oil deforestation

Three mentioned conservation, generally:

- Conservation issues
- Conservation/protection themes & materials
- Conservation (to make people aware of issues orangutans face in the wild)

In addition to the comments above, four zoos specifically mentioned “action” materials:

- Actual information on how the zoo visitor can make a difference or get involved
- How can you make a difference
- Things that people can do to help
- What you can do, shopping guides, and information on OCC [Orangutan Crisis Coalition]

Facts about orangutans

That so many mentioned the need to educate visitors about animal characteristics is not surprising, given the zoo mission. That several zoos specifically suggest using animal facts as a way to enlighten visitors on the need for conservation is a testament to the evolution in zoo education.

- Up-to-date facts & research findings about the status of the orangutan population
- Information that inspires awe for the orangutan’s many amazing abilities and urgency for their conservation plight
- Handouts, cds explaining the uniqueness of orangutans and how we need to save them
- Orangutan behavior is a very interesting way to connect people to animals, especially since much of orangutan behavior closely mirrors our own behavior. Programs that explain this behavior, training or enrichment are very important to understanding the animal and only then will you empower people to make a difference.

Zoos can never abandon their role in initiating visitor motivation by providing basic information about the animals. Several zoos mentioned these basics:

- Behavior, adaptations, biofacts – bone clones, hair, hand and foot models, dress-up costume, food samples, craft projects

- We use footprints on some graphics, great photographs, and skulls provided by education. The handout fact sheets may be the most important tool, however, as lots of people take them home, kids take them to school, etc.
- Eye-catching posters with brief bullet point type information. Coloring sheets with basic info for younger children. Ways that people can compare themselves with an orangutan – arm span, hand size, body dimensions, etc.
- Natural behavior orangutan show, orangutan art gallery, painting demos
- U.S. government orangutan fact sheet
- Orangutan handprint, factsheets
- Orangutan intelligence, wild lifestyle, tool use

Several zoos mentioned themes that would help visitors understand the zoo’s animal welfare responsibilities:

- What it takes to provide excellent care
- The keepers educating the public about them
- The most valuable of all is to talk with a keeper
- Enrichment (to make people aware of the efforts zoos make to provide stimulating exhibits for their animals – and it’s fun for people to help create enrichment)

Q. Do you have adequate access to materials? Would you be interested in sharing your orangutan material templates with other SSP institutions?

Only four zoos indicated that they did not have sufficient access to the materials they cited, which would seem to indicate that information is generally available. Even though it is available, however, the wide range of educational subject matter suggests that perhaps the zoos could benefit from a central repository or exchange protocol as they expand their educational efforts. (Only one zoo indicated a problem with sharing templates, because of “management policies.”)

Q. The Orangutan SSP is holding its third husbandry workshop at Zoo Atlanta from August 31 to September 2, 2009. Would you participate in a supplemental display activity where zoos can share pictures and examples of exhibit messages and educational materials?

Fourteen said yes.

Three weren’t able to commit.

Three zoos said no.

Others:

- While I don’t get to attend this meeting, if there is any way I can contribute items for display please let me know.
- If the funds could be allocated from the budget for us to participate, we would love to, especially since we’ll have lot of ideas/information after our summer camp season that will be revolving around orangutans.
- I can supply images of orangutans and programming.

Q. If the orangutan SSP had unlimited funding, how could it help your zoo improve your orangutan education and/or messaging?

Suggestions ranged from very do-able to major undertakings.

Educational materials

- Palm oil free cards for distribution, much like the seafood watch cards

- Graphic templates (especially on palm oil)
- Better palm oil graphics
- Biofacts and props to provide more engaging contact information
- Biofacts to use for chats
- Updated maps showing where destruction is occurring
- Videos are great maybe updating them as needed
- Since we have some hand raised individuals I would like something about pet trade
- New orangutan dress-up materials (we found the hands aren't lasting well in working order or we just use them too much!)
- Updated fact sheets sanctioned by the SSP, or videos
- Unified materials: a kit with activities, messaging, signage ideas, DVDs, handouts
- Publications, tech info, DVD, etc.
- Materials for teacher workshops and professional development

Educational programming

- If the SSP arranged a speaker's bureau to coordinate orangutan experts, field researchers, conservationists and funded their speaking tours that would be amazing.
- Speakers
- Program templates (like Sandi Linn's "Are You a fan of the Orangutan") that can be easily adapted for your institution.
- Creating educational outreach programming
- A whole week of programming
- Formulate orang-themed education classes to hold on zoo grounds

Outreach

- Support for keepers talking at schools
- Do outreach programs

Advocacy

- National campaign letters (to American companies) that we could offer guests to sign and make a larger impact
- Keep us updated on news effecting orangutans
- Letter writing campaigns

Exhibits

- Public interactions at the exhibit
- More clear ways to illustrate the intelligence of the orangutans – video game like Zoo Atlanta, "water squirt" that orangutans control.
- More arboreal exhibitry so we don't just exhibit "red carpets"
- Improved signage and interactive information
- Improved messaging/materials for exhibitry
- Signage templates
- Better signage, interactive activities (touch screens)
- Update our exhibit messaging to reflect more conservation issues & "hot topics"
- Perhaps rotating exhibit signage

(Funding for exhibits)

- Providing small grants for updated graphics or computers to connect our public with the latest field research and information
- \$ to redo signage for more appropriate/up-dated messaging
- Funding for interactive educational messages would be great. Brachiation bars (monkey bars), life size sculptures and hand print molds. We have looked into installing a couple TourMate machines that would be used for vocalizations and messaging. These cost \$1600 each but do not use electricity and are easy to maintain.
- Actual funding to manufacture signage, etc.

Other funding

- I would love to see a grant funding keeper exchanges so keepers could take the experience back to the zoo as well as bring over Indonesian caretakers.
- We would use the funds to host a “Save the Orangs” event.

Other

- I would also love to see zoos sell locally made products benefiting orangutans.
- More advertising for keeper talks at the zoo
- Just provide more ways for us to get the message across to our visitors.
- We have plenty of access to information – it’s converting the information into a usable form that’s the challenge!

Q: Do you raise dedicated orangutan program funds from the public? If you raise funds for a specific orangutan organization, which one?

Zoos were pretty well split down the middle on this. Ten of the zoos (43%) do not raise funds, although the keepers at two of the those zoos raise funds through keeper organizations (ACE and AAZK) that give to Orangutan Conservancy, Orangutan Outreach and the Orangutan Health Projects. Two zoos indicated that they might fundraise in the future.

Of the eleven zoos (48%) that do raise funds, contributions break out as follows:

Orangutan Conservancy	7 zoos
Kinabatangan Orangutan Conservation Program	2 zoos
BOS-USA	2 zoos
BOS	1 zoo
New program for Serge Wich in Sumatra	1 zoo
Small grants for specific projects	1 zoo

The designation of two zoos for BOS-USA seems to indicate some confusion about which non-profit organizations are supporting which Bornean programs. It is our understanding that Orangutan Conservancy was, at one time, the U.S. group that collected funds for BOS but that they have dropped their support of BOS and that Orangutan Outreach is now the U.S. partner for BOS. (A new non-profit, Orangutan Watch, asked all orangutan organizations to list the projects supported by their fundraising, but the effort was spectacularly unsuccessful, with only two responsive replies – from Orangutan Outreach and from The Nature Conservancy. The funders, i.e., zoos, may get more response if they want to ask the question.)

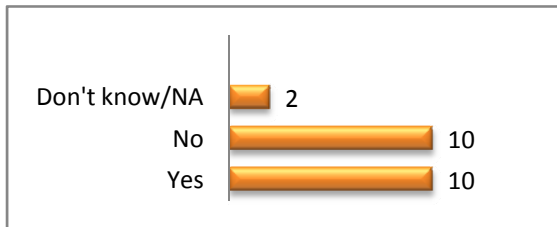
Q: Does your zoo participate in any in situ orangutan projects?

Most of the zoos do not participate in *in situ* projects. The break down of the eight responders who said their zoo does participate (three zoos supported two projects):

Samboja Lestari Reforestation & Rehabilitation Project	2 zoos
Orangutan Conservancy	3 zoos
Kinabatangan Orangutan Conservation Project (KOCP)	2 zoos
Nyaru Menteng	1 zoo
Female hormone research w/ Dr. Cheryl Knott	1 zoo
Smaller projects	2 zoos

Two curators said that their zoo is not directly involved, but that they are involved through other organizations. One has an ACE group that supports SOCP and Nyaru Menteng, and one belongs to an AAZK chapter that provides small grants to *in situ* researchers.

Q. Does your zoo get involved in conservation advocacy (i.e., lobbying governmental agencies, conducting grassroots campaigns, organizing letters to the editor, etc.)?



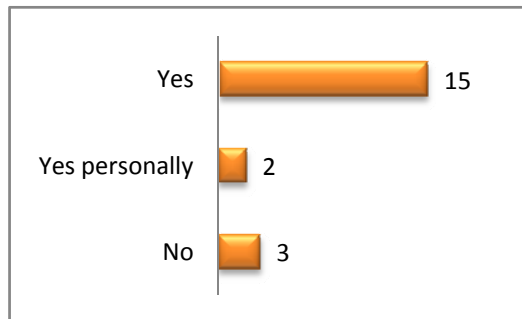
The approach by these zoos is split almost exactly down the middle. Ten do, eleven don't, and two responders didn't know or didn't answer.

That may be changing however. For instance, one of the "no" responders added: "In the past we have a little gun-shy and felt we had to tread lightly on

political issues. We have a new zoo director now and plan to become a bit more involved in the future. Most of our conservation focus has been local/regional in nature, but we are looking to expand that as well." Another said: "We have never been approached but are open to the idea."

Even if the zoo does not advocate, zoo employees do. One responder, an education specialist, explained: "I do a lot of this as an individual, but not as a zoo representative as any of this kind of politicking has to be approved through our zoo director and zoo board."

Q: Would you be interested in participating in a non-AZA national grassroots petition drive to ask governments of Indonesia and Malaysia to conserve and protect their orangutan habitats?



The response to the specific advocacy question had a decidedly positive response. Fifteen said yes; two said they would personally get involved although their zoo may not; two indicated that they weren't sure. Three responders said no; of those, one indicated that "we would prefer it to be an AZA sanctioned drive.

This would appear to be a prime organizing opportunity for an orangutan advocacy organization.

Comments and suggestions offered by survey participants:

A new foundation has formed, the Phelps Great Ape Foundation, which could be incorporated into this as well. They also have palm oil free lotions and soap and boutique shirts that would be great to sell at any fundraisers. They hope to grow this over time.

We were permitted to do a 40th birthday event for our twins the first born Orang twins in North America last year that have lived their whole lives at the zoo. In Feb and it was a record attendance day for winter!

Our program “Pongos Helping Pongos” has raised over \$100,000 for orangutan conservation. Our orangutans paint, then we have the paintings professionally framed, and we hold art gallery exhibitions and auctions. We also do mini-events at Orangutan Awareness and other special weekend events.

We have a free teacher lead education outreach program called “Where’s Robbie” that is sent to schools. You can find out more about the program on our website. <http://www.rollinghillswildlife.com/wheresrobbie.html>. We would be happy to put together a poster regarding this program.

ⁱ *Zoos in the 21st Century: Catalysts for Conservation?*; edited by Alexandra Zimmerman, Matthew Hatchwell, Lesley A. Dickie, and Chris West; Cambridge University Press, 2007

ⁱⁱ The 23 participating zoos exhibiting orangutans were: Zoo Atlanta, Audubon Zoo, Birmingham Zoo, Brookfield Zoo, Cameron Park Zoo, Cheyenne Mountain Zoo, Columbus Zoo, Como Zoo, Denver Zoo, El Paso Zoo, Erie Zoo, Fort Wayne Children’s Zoo, Fresno Chafee Zoo, Houston Zoo, Kansas City Zoo, Louisville Zoo, Oklahoma City Zoo, Phoenix Zoo, Rolling Hills Wildlife Adventure, Sedgwick County Zoo, Toledo Zoo, Utah’s Hogle Zoo, and Woodland Park Zoo.

ⁱⁱⁱ The four non-orangutan zoos that participated in the survey were Caldwell Zoo, Chattanooga Zoo, Knoxville Zoo, and Zoo New England.