

Orangutan SSP Spotlight



Name: Joe Smith, DVM

SSP Job Title: Veterinary Advisor

Brief info about yourself: Joe is currently the Vice President of The Wilds. Prior to that he was the Director of Animal Programs at the Fort Wayne Children's Zoo, where he had worked for 18 years, serving as the zoo's administrator for animal care, animal collection planning, exhibit design, conservation, research, animal health, animal nutrition, records, and behavioral management programs. Growing up in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Joe attended Louisiana State University for both undergraduate and veterinary school. Building a career in animal welfare and conservation, Joe currently serves in numerous advisory roles including as the Orangutan Species Survival Plan (SSP) veterinary advisor, the Passerine Taxon Advisory Group (TAG) steering committee member, the Monotreme and Marsupial TAG veterinary advisor, the Saving Animals From Extinction (SAFE) North American Songbirds treasurer, and Association of Zoos and Aquariums accreditation inspector. Joe also serves as an Associate Editor for the Journal of Zoo and Wildlife Medicine.

Your job title (not SSP, but the zoo you currently work at): Vice President, The Wilds

Your history with orangutans: Joe has been the Veterinary Advisor for the SSP for 16 years. Joe also collaborates with the OVAG group in range countries and has visited Indonesia to see many of the orangutan centers as well as orangutans in the wild.

What did you study in school, internships, volunteering, etc. that helped you get to where you are today? Veterinary medicine for zoo and wildlife species.



Why orangutans? Orangutans found me. I was originally asked to help a group of veterinarians working on orangutan health issues. As time went on, I became hooked and eventually took the role of Veterinary Advisor along with Dr Nancy Lung.



Best experience with orangutans: My best experience with orangutans is definitely the opportunity to see them in the wild in Sumatra. A photo that I took of an adult male is on my mouse pad in my office. He is quite the handsome fellow!

Worst experience with orangutans: I had the unfortunate experience of having a female collapse and die about an hour after giving birth. Despite our best medical efforts at resuscitation, we were unable to get her to respond.

Biggest career accomplishment involving orangutans: By serving as the vet advisor, I hear about many of the challenges and medical issues that the various institutions are facing. By having all of that information coming through a common point, I can start to see patterns emerge. From those patterns, formal recommendations can be made that can have a positive impact on the entire population! For example, recommendations for prophylaxis use against the parasite *Strongyloides* has greatly reduced mortalities of infant and juvenile orangutans in professional care.



ORANGUTAN
SPECIES SURVIVAL PLAN

The most unique form of orangutan memorabilia you own: I have two. One is a hand-carved face of an orangutan that I purchased in Sumatra. The second is a tile that one of our zoo visitors painted from a photo taken of our infant Asmara. Both of these items have a prominent location where they are displayed in my office.