



Press Release

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**POVERTY WILL MAKE GREAT APES HISTORY -- WORLD'S FIRST ATLAS
OF GREAT APES REVEALS HUMAN STRUGGLE BEHIND APES' PLIGHT**

(Reissued as received.)

LONDON, 1 September (UNEP) -- Fewer than 250 wild Sumatran orang-utans may exist in 50 years, their habitat is disappearing and the devastation of the Asian tsunami has accelerated the rate of destruction.

This is among the findings being announced at the launch of the first World Atlas of Great Apes and their Conservation today by the United Nations Environment Programme's World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC), which reveals that it is not just humans that will benefit from a campaign to "make poverty history". For the other six species of great ape -- the eastern and western gorilla, chimpanzee, bonobo, Sumatran and Bornean orang-utan -- it could literally save them from the cooking pot.

The first World Atlas of Great Apes and their Conservation provides a country-by-country assessment of the 23 range States hosting the wild great apes. These countries are among the poorest in the world, so concerted international action is required if these species are to survive.

The Atlas, edited at UNEP-WCMC, is the most comprehensive compendium of information about great apes ever compiled, bringing together the latest research and observations from scientists throughout the world and including contributions from Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Jane Goodall, Richard Leakey, Toshisada Nishida, Russ Mittermeier and Ian Redmond. The book includes conservation status assessments at a species and country-view level. The great apes' biology, behaviour and culture are discussed in detail.

Information from the Atlas will be used to focus international attention for an eleventh hour conservation effort aimed at saving humankind's closest living relatives from extinction. If current trends continue, by 2032: 99 per cent of the orang-utan range will suffer medium to high impacts from human development, as will 90 per cent of the gorilla range, 92 per cent of chimpanzee range and 96 per cent of bonobo range.

The Atlas provides population estimates for the apes and reveals that the survival of the apes is threatened by:

-- Poverty of host countries -- 16 out of the 23 great ape range States have a per capita income of less than \$800.

-- Growing bushmeat crisis -- The Atlas raises concerns over the increasing trade in great ape bushmeat, and the sale of orphans to expatriates wanting to

(more)

"rescue them". Entire groups of adults may be killed to capture one orphan for sale. In Central Africa, a single chimpanzee or gorilla carcass can fetch the equivalent of \$20-25.

-- Fragile habitats -- The Atlas maps the impact of infrastructure development on wildlife, and uses the GLOBIO computer model to simulate future changes. Independent studies support these findings, predicting that if current trends in Indonesia and Malaysia persist, the orang-utan will lose 47 per cent of its habitat in the next 5 years, whilst at least 24 per cent of the bonobo's range in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is already under logging concessions.

-- Habitat fragmentation -- The Atlas presents new information on the distribution of the Cross River gorilla, one of the two subspecies of western gorilla, which has only around 250 to 280 individuals left. These few animals are distributed amongst more than 10 fragmented highland areas. Fragmentation isolates great ape populations from one another, increasing their vulnerability.

-- Disease -- It is also increasingly clear that disease, especially Ebola haemorrhagic fever, is playing a part in the decline of ape populations and new research is needed, along with stronger efforts to limit disease transmission.

The Atlas will be launched today by Klaus Toepfer, Executive Director of UNEP, at the Zoological Society of London, Regents Park, London, with presentations by Lera Miles, UNEP-WCMC, co-editor of the Atlas; Glyn Davies, Director of Conservation Programmes, Zoological Society of London; and Mark Leighton, Chair, GRASP Interim Scientific Commission.

Also at the launch, details of "an indicative list of priority populations", being compiled by the Interim Scientific Commission of the United Nations Great Ape Survival Project (GRASP) headed up by Mark Leighton, will be discussed. The list will also be among the critical issues on the agenda of the Great Apes Survival Project (GRASP) Intergovernmental Meeting: to be held in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, from 5 to 9 September 2005.

Notes for Editors

Quotes from the speakers are included below and case studies and photographs are available on the UNEP-WCMC website; see <http://www.unep-wcmc.org/>.

For media information, please contact: Rachel Holdsworth/Nick Holmes, public relations consultants to UNEP-WCMC, Holdsworth Associates +44-1954-202789, Rachel@holdsworth-associates.co.uk, <http://www.unep-wcmc.org/press/WAGAC/launch.htm>.

For UNEP spokesperson: Nick Nuttall, Spokesperson, Office of the UNEP Executive Director, Nairobi, tel.: +254-20-62-3084, mobile: +41-79-596-5737, fax: +254-20-62-3692, e-mail: nick.nuttall@unep.org, <http://www.unep.org/grasp>.

To order the Atlas: <http://www.ucpress.edu/books/pages/10254.html> or <http://www.earthprint.com/go.htm?to=3505%20>.