

Make a Difference for Wild Orangutans

Palm Oil Messaging at Cheyenne Mountain Zoo



Generally we like to give short conservation messages throughout a talk, but with palm oil it can be really hard to do that without being confusing. During our orangutan natural behavior show, the message is usually given all at once, but not right at the end of the show and not while animals are behaving so that the audience has full attention on what you are saying. These messages are to give ideas about what to say. The first one is long and goes into a little more detail than what is the norm, but for a really captive audience some of the details might be good. This message would happen after the orangutan(s) have already done some behaviors and you have already talked about where they are from.

“Everything that (orangutan name(s)) has done here today shows us that orangutans are really good at living in the rainforest, and in fact that’s the only place they can live. So if they only live in the rainforest and only on two islands, you can imagine if any of that rainforest is lost, it’s a problem for orangutans. If a lot of the rainforest is lost, it’s a big problem for orangutans. Right now there is a big problem for orangutans. It’s called palm oil. It’s in products that everyone here-including me- uses every day. It’s in everything from toothpaste and shampoo to cookies and crackers. It’s pretty much impossible to avoid. The reason it’s such a problem is that the forests where orangutans live are being cut down to grow it.

But the good thing about a problem that’s caused by humans is that it can be solved by humans. And the way we can solve this problem is by choosing sustainable palm oil.

Sustainable means that we use land that has already been cleared instead of cutting more forest, and that endangered animals like orangutans aren’t harmed if they wander onto a plantation. Plantations

who grow palm oil sustainably get certified by the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil or RSPO. Companies who use palm oil to make toothpaste, cookies, shampoo can join the RSPO and make commitments to buy sustainable palm oil. Then where you and I come in as consumers is that we buy our products from those companies that are doing the right thing. It can be difficult to find which companies we should choose, so the PalmOil Scan app was created to make it easier. The app is free, and it tells you how companies are rated based on their commitment to using 100% sustainable palm oil. Not every “excellent” company is using 100% sustainable palm oil right now, but they are at least making very good progress toward it. If you have already downloaded the app and are using it, thank you. If you want to go further to help orangutans, you can write letters to companies. You can ask companies on this app to start using 100% sustainable palm oil right now, and if you can’t find your favorite company on the app, you can write and ask them to join the RSPO and start using sustainable palm oil. There are links to those letters on the app, and we have letters right behind you at the table to sign as well. If you sign a letter we will mail it for you. We really can use our power as consumers to help save this species.”

Most times the window for getting in the message is much shorter depending on the audience. In this case the message is usually more like:

“Orangutans are obviously really great at living in the rainforest, so it’s super important to make sure the forests where they live stay standing. Sometimes those forests are cut down to grow something called palm oil. Palm oil is in many things we all use every day, like toothpaste, and in foods like chocolate and goldfish crackers. Saving this species can really come down to people making the right choices. Farmers that grow palm oil can choose to grow it sustainably- meaning they aren’t cutting down more forest, they don’t harm endangered animals, and they treat their workers better. They get certified by the RSPO (roundtable on sustainable palm oil). Companies that make the products we eat and use can choose to join RSPO, buy their palm oil from those farms, and then we can choose to buy our products from those companies. This free phone app lets you scan products to see whether the company that makes it is sourcing their palm oil sustainably or not. Using this app is the first step for us to help wild orangutans. Signing or coloring a letter to send to companies asking them to do the right thing is another step we can take to help save these animals in the wild, and we have letters to sign right behind you after we finish the show. Just sign the letter and we will mail it for you. Everyone here has the power to make a difference and help save this species in the wild.”

We don’t want anyone to feel like they have to follow a script, and CMZ keepers definitely don’t say things the same each time. Hopefully these give you a few ideas about what you want to say.