



PALM OIL PARADOX

Sustainable Solutions to Save the Great Apes

Marc Ancrenaz, Erik Meijaard, Serge Wich and Julien Simery

Max Houghton, Nicola Abram, Harjinder Kler, Elizabeth Greengrass,

David Jay, Ian Redmond, and Doug Cress



Sustainable Palm Oil and the Great Apes

“Unsustainable palm oil practices are devastating forest ecosystems in Borneo and Sumatra, and are beginning to expand across Africa. This poses a huge threat to the great apes species living in these fragile ecosystems.”

Eric Solheim United Nations Environment Head



Summary

Global demand for palm oil has grown rapidly over the last two decades as a result of rising human populations and expanding food demands, but has come at a terrible cost: biodiversity is lost and critically endangered orangutans and other iconic species are closer to extinction than ever. As Asian development transitions to Africa, the conservation community has no choice but to recognize that this \$62 billion USD industry is here to stay and begin working constructively with responsible companies to ensure that lessons learned and best practices from Asia are implemented in Africa. Adopting responsible practices in the development of sustainable palm oil and other agriculture is a key strategic objective for ensuring that chimpanzees, gorillas and bonobos do not face the same threats as their Asian cousins.

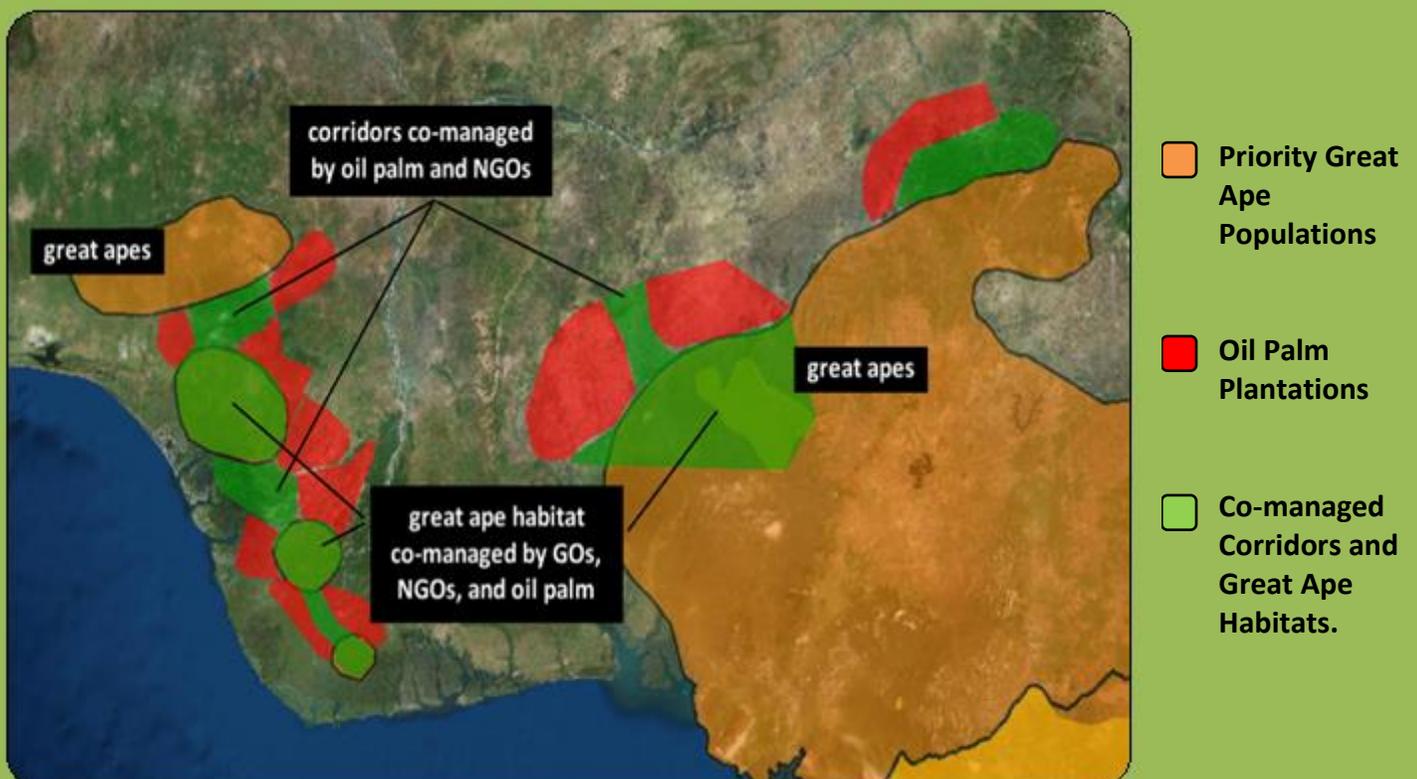
Key Findings

- Oil palm industry will continue to expand, and saying “no” to oil palm development will be unlikely to yield positive conservation outcomes in Africa.
- Oil palm plantation management and great ape conservation objectives can be reconciled through best-management practices.
- Orangutans require well managed forests within the oil palm matrix to survive, and corridors of natural forest within plantations are essential to allow apes to disperse throughout the entire landscape.
- Land-use planning must avoid high-priority orangutan habitats if the species is to survive, and avoiding forest areas and peat lands that contain viable populations is the best way to protect the species.
- Ecological expertise is required to manage orangutan populations in oil palm areas, and positive outcomes can be achieved through careful management of areas where orangutans and oil palm overlap.
- Peat swamp areas, mangroves and floodplains must not be developed for oil-palm production as conversion of these areas can lead to increased flooding, soil erosion, temperature rise and other which outcomes that negatively impact local communities.

Key Recommendations

- Oil palm plantations should not be developed in priority great ape habitat ranges, and “No-Go” zones for oil palm development must be classified. Suitable areas for oil palm development should not be ignored, and responsible sustainable oil palm is best concentrated in ‘certified zones’.
- Locating ‘certified oil-palm zones’ close to great ape habitats minimizes the overall impacts of irresponsible production on great apes habitats.
- Multi-stakeholder processes must be undertaken for oil palm planning near areas with priority populations of great apes, and strict “no-kill” policies must be enforced.
- Environmental teams must be established in each plantation that are trained to monitor, manage, and protect great apes and high conservation value (HCV) forests
- Land-use planning exercises should be developed at national, state, or provincial levels.
- Support food security by avoiding areas used for small-scale agriculture or natural resource use by local communities

Key Proposal



Responsible oil palm companies can stabilize the forest frontier and reduce threats to great apes and other wildlife by establishing well-managed buffer zones that overlap areas of high conservation importance.

Conclusion

The conservation community can no longer afford to sit on the fence regarding the issue of oil-palm development in Africa. It needs to decide now between saying “no” to the industry, because of its negative impact on wildlife, or to say “yes – but.” This analysis, based on the palm oil industry’s development in Southeast Asia and its negative impact on orangutan populations in Borneo and Sumatra, recognizes that the industry is here to stay. Great ape species inhabit 21 countries in equatorial Africa, but some species and subspecies are confined to relatively small areas. Consequently, large-scale land conversion will represent a major threat to sustain viable populations of apes in many places within their range. Seeking an active role in responsible and sustainable palm oil development is a key objective for great apes conservation, and satisfies criteria for economic development, agricultural expansion and poverty alleviation in Africa.

GRASP

The Great Apes Survival Partnership (GRASP) is a unique alliance of over 100 national governments, research institutions, United Nations agencies, conservation organizations and private companies committed to ensuring the long-term survival of chimpanzees, orangutans, gorillas and bonobos and their habitats in Asia and Africa.

Great apes occur in 23 countries across Africa and Asia, many of which are plagued by strife and civil unrest. GRASP focuses on cross-cutting issues such as illegal trade, habitat loss, disease monitoring, sustainable development, eco-tourism and transboundary collaborations, employing the latest technology, tools and resources to meet these challenges.

