

# **How the Products You Buy are Harmful to Sumatran Tigers**

By Lucinda Year 3

**In the rainforests of Sumatra, palm oil plantations are taking over the natural habitats of Sumatran tigers and orang-utans.**



Sumatran Tiger: On the Move.

Picture courtesy of Mrs Mussone

Palm oil is produced from the palm oil tree. Its versatility makes it incredibly useful as the fruit produces palm oil pulp and kernel seed oil, which can be found in a large variety of products. It also produces a variety of chemical by-products and is being used in biofuels.

The palm oil tree produces fruit all year and unlike other fruit trees, one tree will fruit for 30 years, limiting how often new crops need to be planted. Most importantly 50% of the fruit is oil which is higher than any other oil seed plant.

The food industry has come on board due to palm oil's unique assets which allow it to maintain its properties even when cooked. It has a neutral taste, smooth texture and a longer shelf life than other oils making it perfect in commercial cooking.

The usefulness of palm oil around the world has led to a surge in global demand, with half the packaged products on supermarket shelves now containing palm oil. "Palm oil is used widely in cosmetics-soap, shampoos, toothpaste and foods, biscuits, chips, ice-cream, cereals and chocolates," said Taronga Zookeeper Ben.

*"Palm oil is used widely in cosmetics, soap, shampoos, toothpaste and foods."*

Palm oil farming has become a lucrative business as it is the cheapest oil to farm and it takes up less space. According to the WWF, over 90%

of palm oil plantations sites are situated in either Indonesia or Malaysia. This is in part because the tropical forests in Asia are ideal for palm oil plantations. As a result the native vegetation is being removed using large cutting machines and the setting controlled fires so oil palm trees can be planted.



A Sumatran Tiger on the prowl for food. Picture courtesy of Mrs Musrone

Unfortunately, Sumatran Tigers and Orang-utans rely on the native flora and fauna for their survival so the removal of native trees is causing them to become displaced. This is contributing to the decline of their species and their possible extinction. In particular, Sumatran Tigers are being negatively impacted as they no longer have the natural forest coverage to help camouflage, whilst the removal of native fruits is causing the Orang-utans to starve to death. There have been instances where Sumatran Tigers are being killed as they are seen as “agricultural pests” when they try to access food within the plantations.

According to the Orang-utan project website, there has been an estimate that the extinction in the wild of the Sumatran Orang-utans will be in the next 10 years, following on from the Bornean Orang-utans.

What needs to be done is for shoppers to support the use of sustainable palm oil. Shoppers can look out for a label on their products which indicates that the item contains Certified Sustainable Palm Oil (CSPO). If everyone tries to buy products containing sustainable palm oil, we will be well on the way to protecting Sumatran Tigers and Orang-utans long into the future.