



UPDATE 28/04/21

# THE COST OF CARING

## OVER THE YEARS

Founded in 1991, the BOS Foundation started by caring for just one orangutan named Uce in East Kalimantan. This quickly changed. In that first year, November alone saw the arrival of 25 more orangutans. Now, 30 years later, the BOS Foundation is the largest great ape rehabilitation project and sanctuary in the world, as we care for over 400 orangutans across two large rehabilitation centres, one at Nyaru Menteng in Central Kalimantan and one at Samboja Lestari in East Kalimantan.

However, this key figure of 400 orangutans pales in comparison to our long history. For over a decade, due to the lack of secure and safe forests into which we could reintroduce orangutans, all release activities were halted. This meant that for years, orangutans entered the centres, but none were exiting. Our captive populations peaked when in 2013 we cared for 861 orangutans, in addition to 52 sun bears. We were over capacity and over stretched.

It was 2012 when we began to once again release orangutans in both Central and East Kalimantan. We quickly became proficient at carrying out these releases so that all those individual orangutans who had waited so long could finally return to their forest homes. This meant that the populations of orangutans in our centres finally started to decrease towards more manageable numbers.

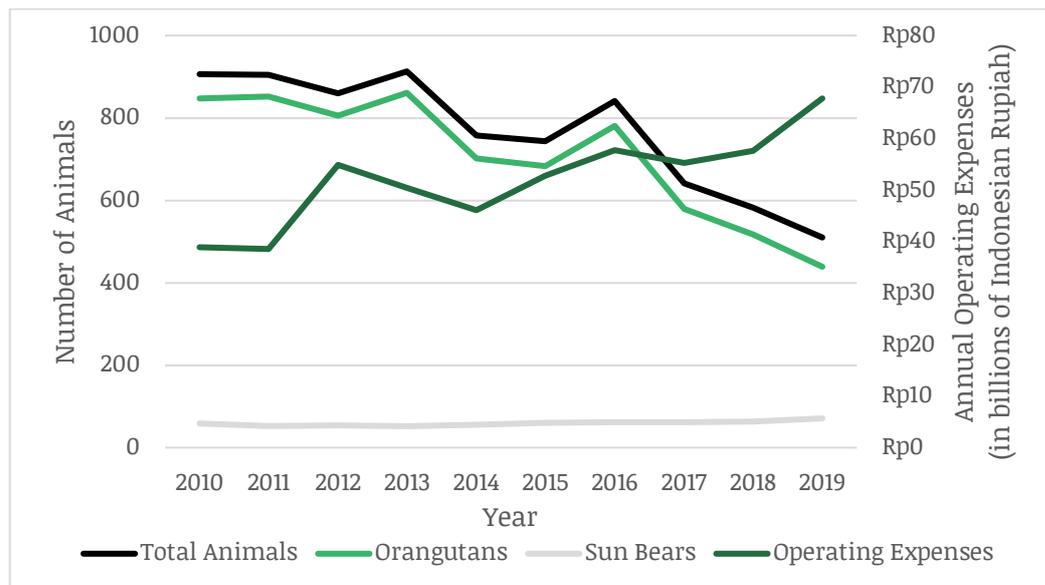


Figure 1. The changes in rehabilitation centre resident populations and total BOS Foundation operating expenses over the 2010 decade.



But as the years passed and the population we cared for in our centres nearly halved, a common question started to arise, “Why have BOS Foundation expenses increased when in reality you have less orangutans in the rehabilitation centres to feed and care for?” The reality of the matter, however, is that this is very misleading (Figure 1) as there is so much more to our work than just serving as orangutan caretakers. In fact, feeding orangutans under our care only accounts for 3% of our budget for the year.

## RELEASE AND BEYOND

When an orangutan is released by the BOS Foundation, that does not mean our work is over, it simply means our role has changed.

The release itself is challenging, and expensive. It varies by the site and the circumstances, but to take groups of orangutans, with veterinary and technical support deep into the heart of Borneo can take many days and multiple modes of transportation. If this is done overland by both car and boat, the transportation can take up to 20,000,000 Indonesian rupiah, nearly 1,500 US dollars, per orangutan if everything proceeds smoothly. If we need to reach more remote locations by helicopter, that gets budgeted at a whopping 90,000,000 rupiah, or 6,400 US dollars per orangutan.

These release expenses were not part of our annual operating budget before 2012.

And while the release itself is the priciest singular step of the rehabilitation process, the work does not end there. Currently, the BOS Foundation runs five post-release monitoring (PRM) camps with full-time teams who track the released orangutans and monitor their behavioural changes over the months and years.

As the populations of orangutans in the centres decreases with every release, the reverse happens in the wild, where the reintroduced population grows larger (Figure 2). This means that the PRM teams must grow to properly monitor the population. The needs of these orangutans are not as intensive as in the centres as we do not feed or teach them, but the radiotracking technology we employ to locate them in the forests and the high costs of travel to reach the remote locations remain high. This year, of our total budget, nearly 7% is dedicated to PRM costs alone, over double what it will cost us to feed every orangutan and sun bear in our centres.

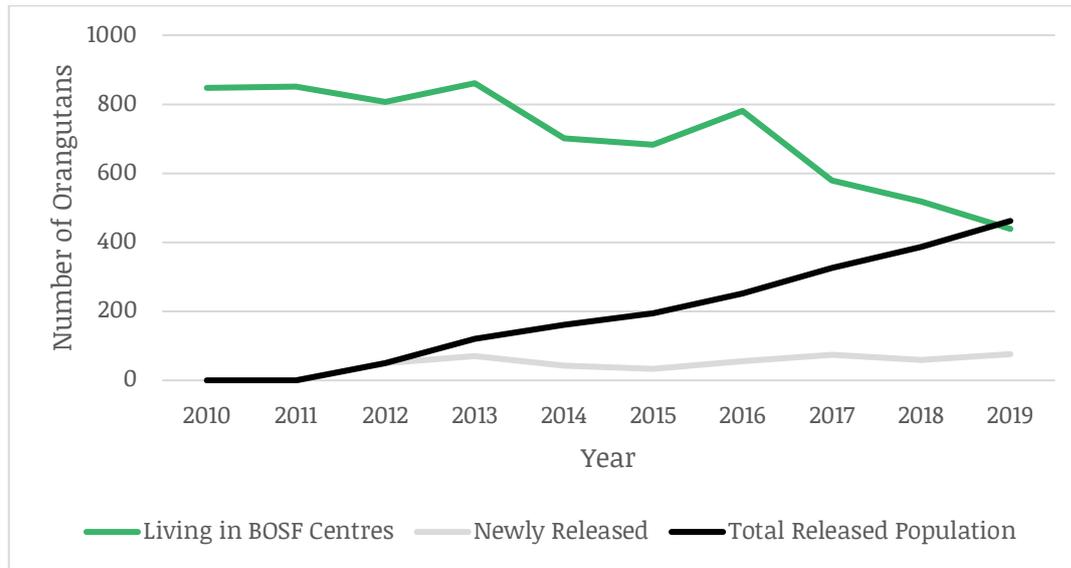


Figure 2. The changes in orangutan populations over the 2010 decade at the rehabilitation centres and release sites due to regular releases starting in 2012.

## THE UNRELEASEABLES

While we at the BOS Foundation dream of a future where every orangutan can live wild and free in open forests, sadly this will not be the reality for many of the orangutans still in our care. With every release, a larger proportion of our rehabilitation centre orangutans are represented by those in need of lifetime sanctuary care.

At present, nearly 200 orangutans in our centres will need lifetime care. This is almost half of our entire orangutan population. Additionally, we also care for more than 70 sun bears who will never be able to return to the forest.

For the unreleasable orangutans, they cannot return to forests due to one or more of the following reasons: a lack of survival skills, abnormal compulsive behaviour, significant physical disability, ex-tuberculosis status, or chronic respiratory disease.

Even though the dietary needs of these orangutans are generally the same as any other in the centre, they represent a disproportionately large share of the expenses associated with animal care due to their increased veterinary needs. While an orangutan on a pre-release island may only need food delivered twice a day and a visual veterinary check once or twice a month, an orangutan being treated for chronic respiratory disease will need daily food deliveries, enrichment, and nebuliser treatment from the veterinarians.

This means that as the total population of orangutans in the centres continues to fall over the years, the cost of care per individual will rise with these high-need orangutans remaining. Next year, the ongoing care of these orangutans and sun bears will represent 13% of our total budget.



### OTHER ACTIVITIES

Undoubtedly, we are best known for our orangutan rehabilitation program. This work has been highlighted time and again in the mainstream media, in series such as Orangutan Jungle School and Orangutan Diary. When people visualise the BOS Foundation, oftentimes it is images of small, cute orangutans in wheelbarrows that come to mind, but, in reality, nearly half of all of our operations have nothing to do with our orangutan reintroduction program (Figure 3).

We also focus our work in three other core strategies: sanctuary care for unreleasable animals, wild orangutan ecosystem conservation, and sustainable community development. In these fields, our activities vary greatly from tree planting and peat re-wetting to monitoring illegal activities and educating students and the public.

Even when we look deeply into the 52% of our budget that focuses on orangutan rehabilitation, less than 27% of it actually covers the activities usually associated with orangutan care, like food, medicine, and enrichment. The largest portion (58%) of our upcoming reintroduction program budgeting is actually associated with development costs that include orangutan releases and, primarily, new construction.

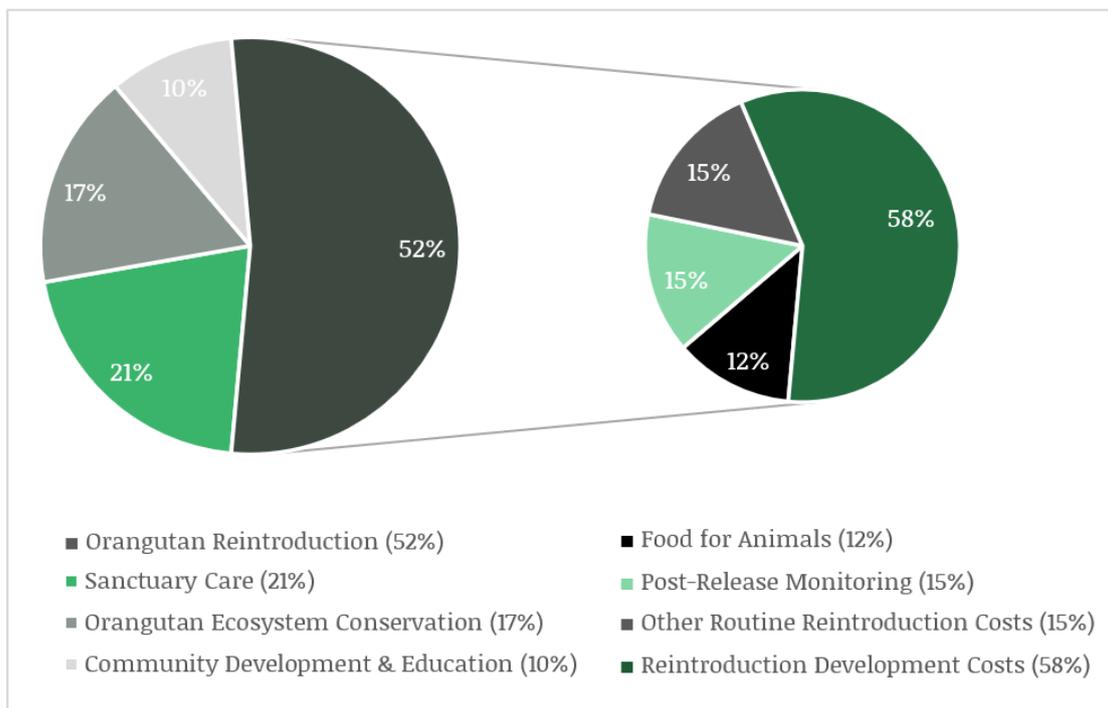


Figure 3. The 2021 BOS Foundation operating budgets for the four core strategies (i.e., orangutan reintroduction, sanctuary care, orangutan ecosystem conservation, and sustainable community development and education). The orangutan reintroduction budget is further broken down in the sub-pie to show the percentage used for food, post-release monitoring, and other routine and development activity under the core strategy.



## DEVELOPMENT AND PROJECTS

Ensuring high standards of animal welfare and effective conservation strategies is not about reaching a goalpost, but rather a continuous cycle of assessment and improvement. To this end, whenever we identify an opportunity, through a collaboration or with the support of a generous backer to improve, we know to act.

Over the years we have undertaken countless projects to improve our facilities in order to increase animal welfare standards and to be more environmentally conscientious. In the past these projects have included many variations including, construction of better and larger cages in the socialisation complexes, purchasing of land for the development of sanctuary and pre-release islands, building large, forested enclosures for sun bears, and the construction of our special care unit to support unreleasable orangutans with exceptional needs.

In the coming year, due to the generous support of concerned funders over outdated infrastructure, nearly half of our entire budget will be dedicated to development costs. The second and third largest portions of our development budget do cover land rehabilitation and community development, respectively (Figure 4). The 61% of the development budget dedicated to construction however will cover a wide range of needed improvements, particularly at our Samboja Lestari Rehabilitation Centre, including green energy in the form of solar power and new, stronger roads to reduce the risk of transportation disruption as a result of flooding and landslides. None of these activities have the same impact as passing an orangutan a piece of fruit, but they undoubtedly increase the welfare of the animals in the long-term.

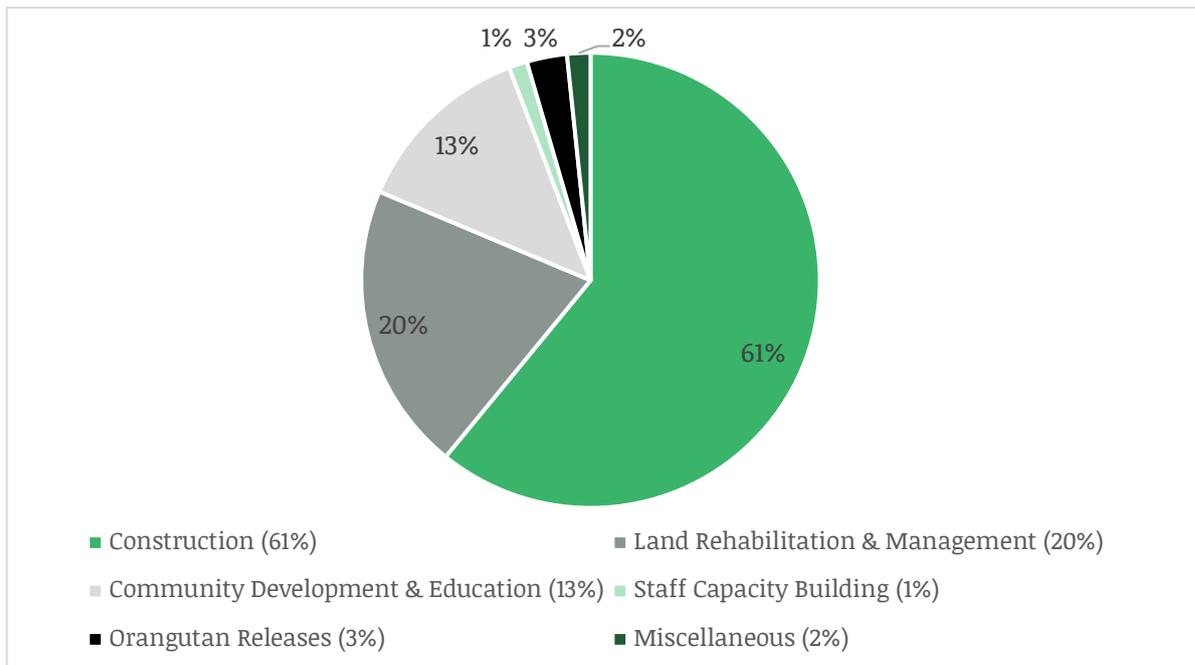


Figure 4. The 2021 BOS Foundation development project budget broken down based on activity type.



## EMERGENCIES

There is one major expense remaining that is especially difficult to anticipate and plan for. This is budgeting for emergencies. They can come in any shape or form, from emergency veterinary treatment as a result of an expected injury or illness to a call to help rescue a macaque and gibbon who were being held captive alongside an orangutan. These expenses arise more frequently than one would expect.

In terms of having large financial implications, nothing threatens our operations on the same scale that forest fires do. With the cycle of the rainy and dry seasons in Indonesia and continued deforestation disrupting the natural safeguards of ecosystems, the question of forest fires is not 'if' they will occur, but rather 'when'.

In some years, like 2020, we were lucky to have a rather 'wet' dry season in our working areas. Even with occasional small fire outbreaks, they were easily controlled and extinguished by our team on standby. But just the year before, in 2019, we lost over 1,400 ha in uncontrolled fires. In 2015, the year set a tragic record for us when over 15,000 ha burned within our working areas.

These disasters not only set back our conservation efforts but present a huge financial obstacle. Battling the fires requires extensive equipment and manpower. Even where these are already in place, the maintenance and overtime costs still exceed our regular budgets. Once the fires are controlled, the related activities are far from over, as the associated smoke frequently causes an outbreak of respiratory disease in the orangutans over the months following and the burnt lands must be rehabilitated and replanted over the years following.

Fires are only one example of how an emergency situation can cause a sudden spike in costs, that we have no choice but to face head-on.

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In the coming years, we expect our role in orangutan and habitat conservation in Indonesia to continue to change and evolve to match the needs of the time. We are working towards a future where we can protect forests so that orangutans will no longer need rescuing. If we are to see this goal become reality, our rehabilitation centres will become sanctuaries and the scope of forest we manage will grow. We dream of a future in preventative activities, not remedial actions; A future where we are protectors instead of rescuers, educators instead of enforcers, forest stewards instead of planters.

**Even with less orangutans in our rehabilitation centres, this does not mean our work is done, and as our role changes form, the challenges we are combating are even greater! For the sake of the orangutans, and our natural world, we will never give up.**