

POSITIVE CHOICES

The plight of our orangutan and how the products we choose can make a difference.

by Mary Gentry, Nutro Body Care

An average day for many of us includes a vast array of choices ranging from our morning grooming routine, to the evening meal. It is safe to say with almost every choice we are just a few degrees removed from the lives and families of the orangutan. What connects us?

Cetyl alcohol, and Capric/Caprylic Triglycerides are widely used in lotions and creams but one may never know they are derived from palm oil.

From Boston to Borneo; San Francisco to Sumatra, the common denominator which links nearly everything we touch is born of Palm. The kernel of palm produces palm oil, a rich oil found in every product imaginable like paint, lipstick, plastics, lotions....basically, anything shiny and smooth. Palm oil can be found on the ingredient list of a wide array of foods, house paints, and personal care products. The rich, silky feel of palm oil makes it a perfect component in massage lotions, oils and creams. The extremely low price of palm oil is a primary factor in its' ubiquitous nature, and it is commonly referred to as the "cheap" oil. But the cost of using palm oil is much higher than one may fully realize.

Palm oil is used throughout the world and produced in several regions, all in equatorial climates. Two major producers are the islands of Borneo and Sumatra where 90% of palm oil produced is exported to western countries. It so happens these islands are the home of our Earth's orangutan. There are but 63,000 orangutan remaining the wild, although the "wild"

is a rapidly shifting ecosystem of rain forest devolving into mono-culture palm plantations and checkerboard pockets of rain forest. The issues go far deeper than this, however. To gain a comprehensive perspective of the devastating impacts from the use palm oil one has to be willing to look at hideous atrocities. Atrocities like burning out the forest leaving orangutan families exposed to kidnap and sale on the black market. Basically, the orangutan's hunt for food and shelter has been made criminal in the interest of palm plantations. The enormous crisis facing our orangutan is compounded by corruption involving corporations, government officers, and local firefighters, turned arsonists, to receive payment for extinguishing the same.

Doug Cress, the Director of the orangutan Conservancy makes it clear that the single most important action is for companies is to provide functional, palm-oil free choices for consumers.

Other names for Palm Oil: Palm Kernel Oil, Capric/Caprylic Triglycerides, Cetyl alcohol, Sodium Laureth Sulphate, Sodium Lauryl Sulphates, Sodium dodecyl, Sulphate palmate, Palm Oil Kernel, Palmitate, Steareth -2, Steareth -20, Sodium Lauryl Sulphate, Sodium lauryl sulfoacetate, Hydrated palm glycerides, Sodium isostearoyl lactylate, anything with palmitate, Elaeis Guineensis, West African Red Palm, Red Palm, Organic Palm, Organic Red Palm

Fortunately, there are groups who have taken on the most important mission of creating safe homes for dispossessed orangutan and the inseparable issue of deforestation. One such entity is the orangutan Conservancy OC, based in Los Angeles, Directed by Norm Rosen, and other tireless, selfless people like Dr. Rosen, and Doug Cress. Doug has worked for the OC, as one of their Vice Presidents since 2007. When asked how he became involved with the plight of orangutan he explains, "As a reporter for 20 years I got tired of being objective. At some point you just have to take a side and that's what I did." Doug goes on to share the event which catapulted him into the world of orangutan.

In the late 90's, he was in South Africa where he read a story in local news about a baby



chimpanzee that had been confiscated by authorities. He followed the story, and the chimpanzee, to Zambia where he found Sheila Fiddle and her chimpanzee sanctuary. He cradled a baby chimpanzee ... the rest is history.

The OC helps raise funds, and awareness, to support projects which provide care for thousands of orphaned, and homeless orangutans ... refugees, if you will. Doug's career began several years earlier as the Executive Director for the Pan-African Sanctuary Alliance PASA, which manages 18 sanctuaries in 12 African countries. He quickly skims over his 20 year career as a reporter for The Washington Post, the Atlanta Constitution, Time Magazine, Sports Illustrated, LA Daily News, amongst others. It's clear his most important mission is the protection of the orangutan, and ecosystems throughout the equatorial region.

**Check ingredients:
Look for companies who
provide the full list of
product ingredients on
their website.**

The OC focuses efforts toward the education of local communities, corporations, governments and the public at large. The biggest challenge is unifying the fragmented network of various organizations similarly focused on the orangutan and their habitat. In order to quantify the enormity of this crisis compare just one rehabilitation

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center in Borneo, which cares for over 1500 orangutans (their numbers grow daily) and 52 American zoos which care for 208 orangutans. It is disparate, to say the least, but best characterized as a crisis of such magnitude which makes the mind reel when the overwhelming momentum is fully realized.

Some corporations responded to public pressure by creating the group known as 'Round Table on Sustainable Palm Oil' (RSPO). Established in 2001, the RSPO was designed to set clear ethical and ecological standards for producing palm oil. The RSPO's website states: "...there is serious concern that not all palm oil is being produced sustainably, at present. Development of new plantations has resulted in the conversion of large areas of forests with high conservation value and has threatened the rich biodiversity in these ecosystems. The expansion of oil palm plantations have also given rise to social conflicts between the local communities and project proponents in many instances." Over the years, the list of members has expanded to include familiar global brand names such as Nestle, Tesco, and Cadbury's, Cargill, ADM and others.

Doug explains that currently there are no bona fide standards for the palm oil industry. Even the RSPO, who set itself up to be the leader in palm oil standards, is dominated by the self-interest of corporations who lean more toward green washing than doing the hard work of eliminating palm oil use.

Subsequently, we find that "organic", or "sustainable" palm is simply a myth. Organic merely takes into account the methods used to grow crops. The term sustainable in reference to palm oil is wholly misleading, even when vendors claim that their palm comes from "old" plantations. The sourcing of palm oil is too hard to verify, so in the end the most effective action is to avoid palm oil altogether.

It comes back to all of us as consumers, who have the most powerful voice in protecting our Earth's orangutan. Doug expresses the need for companies to take a strong stance and provide affordable, quality products for consumers. The fix is not asking consumers to become chemists in order to interpret product labels, but rather to provide clear and honest options free of the ugliness associated with palm oil ... free of palm. We can help by purchasing only products made without palm oil, or derivatives of palm; writing a company and requesting that they stop using palm; donating to organizations like OC, RAE and PASA. But perhaps most importantly we can educate those around us.

It is up to us, as a civilized society, to recognize the enormous crisis facing the orangutan and act accordingly. We have a right to feel good about the choices we make and the goods we purchase, and companies should be willing to offer this both openly and honestly.

ABOUT MARY:

Mary co-owns Nutro Body Care where she uses her extensive environmental and public health background in the formulation of massage and spa products. She is a Registered Environmental Health Specialist, Emeritus with formal degrees in biological sciences. She enjoys the outdoors; good water; star filled skies and the wildness of sandhill country.