



For more information, contact:

Al Setka
Director of Communications
Great Ape Trust of Iowa
515.243.3580
515.720.7430 (mobile)
asetka@greatapetrust.org

Great Ape Trust of Iowa scientist honored with conservation award

*Serge Wich recognized by Wisconsin National Primate Research Center
for Sumatran orangutan field studies with Indonesia students*

Des Moines, Iowa – November 25, 2008 – A scientist at Great Ape Trust of Iowa, and one of the world’s leading experts on orangutans and their habitat, has been honored with a prestigious conservation award by the Wisconsin National Primate Research Center. Dr. Serge Wich is the 2008 recipient of the Lawrence Jacobsen Conservation Research Award, which supports studies in applied conservation biology that protect nonhuman primates in their habitat. Wich has been awarded a \$5,000 grant to help fund Sumatran orangutan research by students from Universitas Nasional in Jakarta and Universitas Syiah Kuala in Banda Aceh.

“As a flagship species, the orangutan symbolizes the importance of the rain forest – not only to the apes and the millions of other forest species but also to the people who live near the forests and those of us around the world affected by climate change,” said Wich. “I’m very honored and pleased that colleagues view the project as a meaningful contribution to orangutan conservation. Providing opportunities for Indonesian scientists-in-training to become conservation biologists is crucial for the future protection of orangutans and their habitat.”

The scientists’ research will focus on the impact of selective logging on Sumatran orangutan behavior and survival. A better understanding of logging’s effect on orangutans is

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necessary to design reduced-impact logging systems. These managed systems might provide opportunities for the partial extraction of timber while still conserving orangutans and their habitat. While such analysis hasn't been conducted for Sumatran orangutan populations, Wich said what greatly benefits these studies is 35 years of scientific data collected at the orangutan research site Ketambe. Important information on orangutan behavior, demography, density and food availability has provided a comprehensive pre-logging database that will be compared with the post-logging data now being collected by Indonesian and non-Indonesian students in collaboration with local field staff.

"By comparing pre-logging and post-logging data, we will be able to identify any significant changes in orangutan behavior, feeding ecology, survival and density that have resulted from logging," Wich added. "These results will be important for orangutan conservation management strategies."

DR.SERGE WICH

A native of the Netherlands, Wich completed his undergraduate studies at the University of Amsterdam. He earned his Masters of Science degree from Utrecht University and conducted research on foraging behavior in orangutans in Ketambe, a research station in northern Sumatra under the supervision of noted scientists Professor Jan van Hooff, Dr. Liesbeth Sterck and Dr. Suci Utami.

In the mid-1990s, while working for the Max-Planck Institute in Germany, Wich studied bonobo foraging behaviour at the Lomako research site in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

In 1997 he returned to the Ketambe research station to conduct a Ph.D. on the vocal behavior of the Thomas langur. Wich's four-year study focused on the structure and function of the male long-distance vocalizations. During this period he also conducted several surveys in collaboration with Dutch researcher Dr. Herman Rijkssen to assess the conservation status of the orangutan. Wich completed his Ph.D. at Utrecht University in 2002.

Under supervision of Dr. Liesbeth Sterck and Professor Carel van Schaik, he began a post-doctoral study to compare the innovative behavior of orangutans in Ketambe and a newly established research site, Tuanan, in Central Kalimantan on the island of Borneo. He is currently directing research at the Ketambe research station together with Dr. Ian Singleton of the Sumatran Orangutan Conservation Programme and Dr. Suci Utami and Tatang Mitra Setia from Universitas Nasional in Jakarta and managing the Ketambe long-

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term orangutan database which contains data collected from 1971 to present. Wich's field research focuses on geographical variation in orangutan behavior and ecology as well as on orangutan vocal communication, cognition, and conservation.

GREAT APE TRUST

Great Ape Trust of Iowa is a scientific research facility in southeast Des Moines dedicated to understanding the origins and future of culture, language, tools and intelligence. When completed, Great Ape Trust will be the largest great ape facility in North America and one of the first worldwide to include all four types of great ape – bonobos, chimpanzees, gorillas and orangutans – for noninvasive interdisciplinary studies of their cognitive and communicative capabilities.

Great Ape Trust is dedicated to providing sanctuary and an honorable life for great apes, studying the intelligence of great apes, advancing conservation of great apes and providing unique educational experiences about great apes. Great Ape Trust of Iowa is a 501(c) 3 not-for-profit organization and is certified by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). To learn more about Great Ape Trust of Iowa, go to www.GreatApeTrust.org.

LAWRENCE JACOBSEN CONSERVATION RESEARCH AWARD

The Lawrence Jacobsen WNPRC Conservation Research Award supports studies in applied conservation biology that protect nonhuman primate species in their habitat. Preference is given to those working directly with a nonhuman primate species on the IUCN threatened or endangered list. The annual, \$5,000 award is available to students and faculty who are affiliated with an academic institution or a non-governmental agency with a focus on primate conservation. Larry Jacobsen was director of the Primate Center Library from 1973-2003. His many honors have included the Distinguished Service Award from the American Society of Primatologists in 1997 and the Library of the Year Award from the Wisconsin Library Association in 1995.

WISCONSIN NATIONAL PRIMATE RESEARCH CENTER

The Wisconsin National Primate Research Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison is one of eight federally-supported (NIH-NCRR) National Primate Research Centers and the only one in the Midwest. More than 250 center scientists, through

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competitive grants, conduct research in primate biology with relevance to human and animal health.

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