

Napagang's Story

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Date arrived at Sepilok: 6th February 2024

Age on arrival: 2 years

Sex: Male

Early one morning in a small village, nestled within the Ulu Sungai forest, a man was alerted by his dogs frantically barking outside. When he went to investigate, he was shocked to find a young, terrified orangutan, huddled on the ground. The man's first instinct was to get the orangutan to safety. He carefully ushered him into an empty chicken coop before calling Sepilok for help, watching out for any sign of his mother.

Once our team arrived and searched the area, they found no sign of the orangutan's mother. We'll never know what happened to her but it's likely something tragic occurred. A mother abandoning her baby is incredibly rare and only happens in extreme circumstances. Infant orangutans rely on their mother's care and protection for the first eight years of their life. The consequences of them being separated before this time can be devastating. At around two years old, this baby was too young to survive in the rainforest alone for much longer and would still be reliant on his mother's milk.

An initial health check revealed dark stains on his teeth which were the result of eating forest berries. This discovery showed he had been fending for himself in the forest for a few days, foraging for enough food to keep himself alive – a skill infants normally spend years learning from their mothers. His ability to survive in this way is a testament to his resilient and resourceful nature. However, just eating berries would not have been enough to sustain him long-term. Much like humans, orangutans need a varied and balanced diet to ensure that they get the right nutrients to grow healthy and strong.

Once at Sepilok, he was given a name, Napagang, after the village he was found in. Arriving at the centre was overwhelming and extremely traumatic for tiny Napagang. Surrounded by unfamiliar sounds, smells and sights, everything was completely different to his rainforest home. Despite his care team doing their best to keep him calm and comfortable, it was a disorienting and frightening experience.

During a full health check, the vet found evidence of a bone fracture in one of Napagang's arms. The injury, which could have been caused by a fall or a previous negative encounter with humans, had already healed. Although there were no immediate signs of discomfort or pain, an injury like this could cause problems as he grows, so it will be monitored closely. As arboreal mammals, those who live above the ground in trees, orangutans rely on their long arms to survive in the wild. They are used for moving from vine to vine or branch to branch - a movement known as brachiating, climbing, foraging and nest-building.

Following a quarantine period of three months, Napagang was introduced to the rehabilitation programme and some of the other, infant orangutans like Agop and Adie. At first, he watched the young females in awe. The ropes of the jungle gym were a completely new sight and experience for Napagang. Tentatively at first, he hung on one of the ropes, not moving at all. Gradually, he started to inch his way along, placing one hand in front of another, still wary of this strange new material and cautious about the others. Once he realised the ropes led to the trees, where Agop and Adie were now watching him, he sped up to join them in the more familiar surroundings of the rainforest where his confidence flourished.

Napagang has been through a lot for such a young orangutan but his ability to adapt to new environments and situations have helped him grow stronger. We have high hopes for this spirited little orangutan and look forward to sharing his rehabilitation progress with you. Thank you for supporting Napagang on this journey.

Photos: Spirited & Hopeful