

MILLER

all-terrain



supporting acquisition individuals worldwide

www.millertripods.com



Documenting the Old Men of the Forest

IN CENTRAL Kalimantan, Indonesia, vast stretches of rainforest are being cleared to make way for palm oil plantations. Wild animals, including populations of orangutans, are finding themselves isolated in shrinking forest islands in the midst of inhospitable and dangerous terrain.

Evania Wright and Nick Lyon from Cockroach Productions have teamed up with the Indonesian-based Balikpapan Orangutan Survival Foundation to document and raise awareness of the situation under the aegis of the Orangutan Film Protection Project. The OFPP have been following the rescue teams based in Nyaru Menteng in Central Kalimantan as they fight to relocate 400-600 orangutans.

According to Evie and Nick, the majority of wildlife documentaries often perpetuate an illusion of the pristine. The encroachment of roads, railways, aeroplanes, cities, and people is kept safely out of sight. The pair hope to highlight the increased contact between industrial society and natural environments as they rapidly fragment into isolated pockets.

The pair believe that the growing popularity of feature length documentaries in the box-office reflects a customer desire to consume information and develop a more acute and critical political awareness. With knowledge comes choice of action, and this is a powerful tool when sales dictate corporate strategies.

Thus far, says Nick Lyon, the team has been stationed in Jakarta at the Schmutzer Primate Centre in the heart of Ragunan Zoo.

"We have started to shoot the documentary. Our first footage was a disturbing undercover operation to document exploitation of orangutans in the circus. We managed to film both the performance and gain access to the backstage area to find how the orangutans were housed when not performing."

Nick says orangutans are the largest arboreal species living today, yet these naturally quadrupedal animals are forced to walk on two legs and dress in clothes, drink soft drinks and once the performance is over they are put back in a small cage.

Nick says Animal welfare laws do not exist in Indonesia. Keeping orangutans is illegal, but it is possible to obtain permits for keeping them.

"How these permits are obtained is something we are investigating," he says. "We have also built



Cockroach Productions' Evania Wright and Nick Lyon with Miller Solo carbon fibre tripod and DS20 fluid head in action at Jakarta's Ragunan Zoo.

up a network of local environmentalists who are helping us to understand the traffic of endangered species in Indonesia. This animal trade has a direct correlation to oil palm concessions – as more and more incursions are being made into primary forest there is an increase in human-wildlife contact.

"We leave for Kalimantan tomorrow. We had a message from the rescue centre that an orangutan had been attacked last week. Its hands had been bound so tightly that they were almost severed. The orangutan died en route to the clinic at the rescue centre. In the same area there are three more orangs in immediate danger. We are preparing ourselves to film this sort of terrible story.

"It has been fun getting down to filming. Jakarta is hot and humid, and you feel it even more when



One of the many endangered orangutans.

you have your eye pressed against the viewfinder of the camera. Up on the keepers' walkway over the orangutan enclosures here the heat is baking. We've had to start putting an umbrella up to keep ourselves and the camera cool. "The keepers' wall was very high, so we used the tripod to its maximum extension to get the pans of the enclosures. The humidity has made some of our kit stiff, but our tripod [a Miller Solo carbon fibre tripod with DS20 fluid head] has remained smooth and is performing well.

"Life in the zoo has been quite surreal. We are surrounded by 22 different species of primates, mostly native to Indonesia. We have a natural alarm clock in the dawn chorus of the gibbons and siamang, in the evening we hear tigers roaring in Ragunan. The other night we were stuck for dinner, so we raided the gorillas' store room and ate a good casserole. We have made many friends here, both human and non-human primates. We will be sad to leave tomorrow, but excited to get to the real jungle.

"Our filming is filled with a sense of urgency as we see what is happening here. Indonesia's wildlife is in a state of crisis – luckily we are meeting a number of very passionate people who have dedicated their working lives to work against the destruction of one of Indonesia's most valuable resources – its biodiversity and potential for a booming eco-tourism trade."

For online project updates visit www.cockroachproductions.blogspot.com