

Reading: Growing Oil Palm in Indonesia

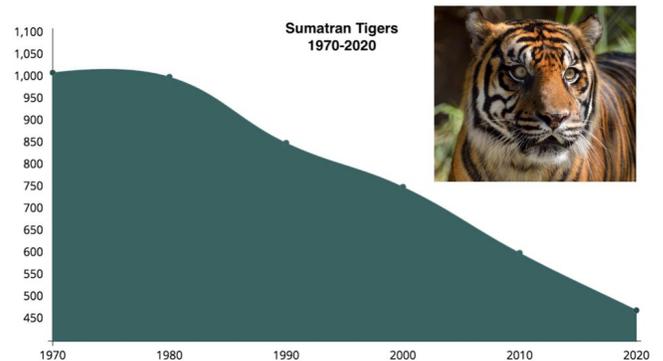
Palm oil comes from the fruit of oil palm trees that are grown in warm areas near the equator. The palm oil we get from these trees can be used for cooking and in food products, detergents, and cosmetics. Palm oil is found in more than half of all packaged products that Americans consume, like lipstick, soaps, candy, and even ice cream. Many food and beauty products need oil as an ingredient to achieve the right consistency. Some of the original oils used in food and beauty products were bad for our health, so scientists were excited when they discovered palm oil as a replacement.



Oil palm trees produce a lot of palm oil using less land compared to other types of plants that make oil. The demand for palm oil is increasing rapidly so more land needs to be used to grow this plant. Producing 1 ton of palm oil requires .25 hectares of land (just under half of a football field). Indonesia is the largest producer of palm oil. Most of the Indonesian oil palms are grown on the islands of Borneo and Sumatra. To make space for large oil palm plantations, large areas of tropical rainforest trees and plants (examples: figs, tall trees, small bushes) have been cut down.

There is concern about orangutans and tigers, whose populations appear to be going down. Orangutans live high in the forest trees and eat fruits. Palm kernels are not a food source for orangutans.

Tigers hide in the brush to hunt their prey and palm oil plantations do not have this brush. Indonesia has already lost two types of tigers to extinction, the Bali tiger and the Javan tiger. The only remaining population of tigers is the Sumatran tiger, and scientists estimate that there are fewer than 500 left.



Even though some animal populations are going down in this area, other animal populations are doing well living in the new oil palm plantations, such as local rats, pigs, and snakes.

