



Let's stick together: Nine-month-old orphans Tulip, Gunung, Rocky and Noel arrive at the rescue centre



We're there: Some timid and one very bold, the youngsters tumble out of their wheelbarrow taxis



A wheel delight: Three barrow loads of baby apes are taken out to play in the jungle by volunteers wearing masks to avoid passing on human germs

**A** RMS wrapped around each other for balance as their wheelbarrow taxi bumps along a jungle path, these adorable baby apes are on their way to their own private patch of rainforest — all thanks to the generosity of Daily Mail readers.

by Christopher Stevens

Wonder is written on their faces as they peer over the edge of the barrows to see what might be around the next corner. One particularly curious passenger seems in danger of falling out as he leans precariously over the front wheel.

When they reach their destination, in the middle of Borneo's lush jungle, sheer excitement gets the better of them. They spill out, tumbling over each other in a tangle of skinny, red limbs, eager to explore.

It's mayhem, until their keepers — wearing facemasks to avoid passing on human germs — are able to round them up, and lead them by the hands to the trees where they can swing from branches, forage for food and learn to live as wild orangutans.

Life could have been very different for these affectionate and trusting babies, who hand-in-hand with their

human guardians, look uncannily like a group of nursery school children on a day out.

It seems impossible to believe that, without the support provided by your donations, they would have been doomed to a wretched existence in captivity, half-starved, beaten and living in chains as illegal trophy pets.

All these young orangutans, one of the world's most endangered species, are orphans. They are the victims of logging companies who are destroying their habitat in Borneo and of hunters who kill adult orangutans and sell the babies to the black-market pet trade, where they fetch high prices.

Life in captivity is harsh. Chained up, underfed, mistreated and beaten by their owners — and sometimes tormented by local children — pet orangutans in Borneo rarely live to be fully grown.

Females mature sometime between the ages of six and 11 but males are not fully adult until they are 15. Since

# BARROW LOADS OF MISCHIEF!

Trundling off to their private jungle playground, orphan baby orangutans saved by YOUR generosity

the appeal was published in the Mail two years ago, £500,000 has been raised to enable the International Animal Rescue charity (IAR) to build an orangutan sanctuary on 64 acres in Sungai Awan, Indonesian Borneo.

The red-haired babies sleep in a safe compound each night, and go out to play and rediscover their freedom in the forest enclosure every day.

But this is much more than primate playtime — it's essential for their health because orangutans aren't built for walking.

They are tree-dwelling animals, uncomfortable on the ground, and their legs are not designed to take their weight for any distance, especially when they are young and still developing. Their feet are really a second pair of hands, made for holding and grasping branches rather than taking a stroll.

So local volunteers load their charges into wheelbarrows and trundle them to the trees. When evening falls, the one-wheeled taxi service is back again to take them home to bed.

Alan Knight, the chief executive of IAR, says: 'For every baby orangutan at the centre, a mother orangutan has died, not to mention all the males that must also have been killed.'

Two years ago, the Mail highlighted the plight of a female orangutan called Mely. She had been captured 15 years

earlier and kept as a pet by a fisherman who had shot her mother. Chained up on the verandah of a hut, Mely survived on the scraps thrown to her by tourists.

Help poured in from Mail readers and IAR was able to save Mely and dozens of others. But there's more still to do.

In the wild these creatures can travel up to 3.5km a day through the tree canopy, so the charity's ambitious plan is to buy land off the coast of Borneo and create entire island sanctuaries, where Mely and others can be gradually reintroduced to the wild.

Land in Southeast Asia is cheap, by Western standards. One island for six orangutans would cost about £12,000 — but running costs are much higher, an estimated £50,000 a year.

The work is vital. Thanks to the destruction of their rainforest habitat by timber companies and palm oil growers, as well as the cruel pet trade, orangutan numbers have plummeted from 315,000 in 1990 to fewer than 50,000 today.

Without urgent action, orangutans could soon be extinct in the wild. And joyous scenes like this will be nothing but painful reminders that with a little determination we could have done much more to save them.

**IF YOU would like to donate, go to [melysland.com](http://melysland.com) or [internationalanimalrescue.org](http://internationalanimalrescue.org)**



That's your lot, guys: After a swinging time in the forest, the weary orangutans are wheeled off to bed

Pictures: ROGER ALLEN/ANDRITH DOWNS PICTURE AGENCY/RESEARCH; ALLAN HALL