



The Power of Awareness

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We interview Chelsea Matthews, RAN Forest Campaigner.

Every one of us can contribute to saving the rainforest every day, whether it's choosing one product over another at the grocery store, donating a few dollars to rehabilitation efforts, sending an email to an irresponsible company, or explaining to a friend why you can't, in fact, pick up a certain brand of cookies. One of the most powerful ways to help, though, is to raise awareness throughout your community and elsewhere. In this issue, through an article about how to spread the word and an interview with Chelsea Matthews, RAN Forest Campaigner, we explore ways to maximize your positive impact on the critically endangered orangutan.

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RAINFOREST CHALLENGE #1

Over the next three months, there are many ways you can help raise awareness about the problems with palm oil and how to help. We at the Orangutan Gang encourage you to help us spread the word through this issue's Rainforest Challenge.

Over the next month, we challenge you to **tell three of your friends** about the palm oil issue, directing them to our website www.orangutangang.org and encouraging them to take our palm oil free pledge.

ORANGUTAN GANG NEWS

The Orangutan Gang is proud to distribute its first newsletter! In this quarterly newsletter, you can learn about a rainforest related topic in a short article, meet a dedicated Orangutan Supporter in our Member Spotlight, read an interview with a successful conservationist, take on a Rainforest Challenge, and learn about a sustainable product.

We would also like to announce several upcoming events and the latest news. On Tuesday, May 21 at 7:00 pm MST, Pangaea F, Orangutan Gang founder and director, will be giving a Conservation Series talk at [Zoo Boise](#). Pangaea will also be giving a talk online through [Athena's Advanced Academy](#) on May 20 at 6:00 pm MST. This summer, The Orangutan Gang will also be hosting a merchandise booth at the [Davidson Young Scholar Summit](#). In addition, the Orangutan Gang has just put out a new petition- *stop SSA from using undercertified palm oil in zoos*- which you can sign [here](#). Other news and upcoming events will be announced on our website www.orangutangang.org.



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Molly T

“My name is Molly and I have been aware of the damage palm oil does to our ecosystem and orangutan habitats ever since last summer when I heard Pangaea F presenting about the Orangutan Gang at the Davidson Young Scholar Summit. Since then I have told my family about this problem (thereby raising awareness), stopped using as many products as possible that contain palm oil, and learned to identify palm oil by its many aliases. I have also written to companies that use palm oil.

“I have written to multiple companies, but one of the most memorable moments is one with [Whole Foods Market](#). I wrote to them. I got a form letter. This letter said their palm oil was ‘sustainable.’ I wrote back to them refuting this argument. I got a copy of the same form letter. I called them. I got someone inexperienced who did not appreciate the gravity of the situation. This made me feel frustrated with bureaucracy. This experience taught me just how far some companies will go to stay set in their ways, and I feel that the best way to fight this is by raising awareness. Raising awareness may cause companies like Whole Foods Market to get less business, which will hurt them in the place they care about most—their pocketbook. Palm oil is a problem that most people do not see as a problem, and I feel that the best way to solve this problem is by being informed and spreading our knowledge. Thank you.”

If you are an Orangutan Gang member looking to be featured in an upcoming Member Spotlight, contact us at orangutangang.org@gmail.com and you could end up in our newsletter!





SPREADING THE WORD

Not many people are aware that there could be rainforest destruction in their skim milk, orangutan deaths in their diesel tank, or global warming in their ice cream. It's not widely known that deforestation stretches to your morning shower, midday snacks, and dinner table. Palm oil is not common knowledge, and neither is the deforestation and degradation that come along with it. But you can change that.

You have the power to raise awareness about the palm oil issue. Most people may not know about the palm oil issue, but you do, and you can spread the word, educating those who are uninformed. People that you inform will now be able to educate others, further increasing your impact. Every extra person matters and can create a positive impact on the rainforest. Spreading the word can range from casually mentioning palm oil to a friend to spending an afternoon going around the block with a bag of printed flyers. You could save the life of an orangutan in need or rescue a swath of rainforest from destruction just using the power of your voice. Now go out and raise awareness!

FEATURED PRODUCT #1

HAND IN HAND SOAP

This issue, we feature Hand in Hand Soap, a company looking to minimize their environmental impact while maximizing their benefit to children in need. Hand in Hand is 100% palm oil and palm oil derivative free and can be purchased at [ULTA Beauty Stores](https://www.ulta.com) or online at www.handinhandsoap.com. Way to go Hand in Hand!



CHELSEA MATTHEWS INTERVIEW

Chelsea Matthews is the Forest Campaigner at [Rainforest Action Network \(RAN\)](#), a nonprofit focused on using people power to challenge unsustainable companies. Here, Chelsea is interviewed by Pangaea F, Orangutan Gang founder and director.

PF: How did you get involved with RAN and the palm oil issue?

CM: During college I worked on a food sovereignty and Indigenous rights campaign in Ecuador where I conducted research on the corporate control of local food systems. Through this experience I became very passionate about the impacts of global agribusiness on the environment and human rights. After I returned to the US, I wanted to dive deeper into this area of work and found an internship at Rainforest Action Network on their agribusiness campaign, and that's when I started to learn about Conflict Palm Oil. I've now been working on palm oil as a staff member at RAN for over seven years.

PF: What are some of the ways RAN raises awareness about rainforest destruction, and how do you implement those programs?

CM: The core of RAN's work is creating smart public campaigns that exert pressure on the biggest corporations responsible for rainforest destruction, climate pollution and human rights abuses. In partnership with local, Indigenous and frontline communities, we identify and conduct research into cases of rainforest destruction, then analyze the corporate actors and campaign against the biggest economic players to shift the public conversation. Through our campaigning we aim to pressure bad actors to adopt and implement policies that respect people and planet. The goal is to not only shift individual targets but to also shift entire industrial sectors – in the case of palm oil, we are working to transform the way palm oil is produced. To raise awareness, move our corporate targets and transform sectors, our campaigns employ a wide range of tactics including high-profile direct communications, grassroots organizing and peaceful direct actions, coordinated media and people powered social media campaigns, incisive research and hard-hitting reports, collaborative partnerships as well as high-level corporate negotiations (and relentless follow-up to ensure promises are kept).



All articles by Pangaea F unless otherwise stated

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PF: What public reaction have you observed to the palm oil issue, and how do you believe that reaction could be improved through motivation?

CM: Once people learn about palm oil and its impacts to forests, wildlife and local communities, they most commonly feel upset, sad, and/or angry. At the same time, many people feel helpless to solve an industrial-scale problem taking place half a world away from their everyday lives. As a result, many people respond with a desire to boycott products containing palm oil - which is valid. But palm oil itself is not the problem, rather it is the way palm oil is produced. As the highest yielding oil crop per hectare of land, boycotting or banning palm oil risks shifting the destruction to another vegetable oil and other regions. Also, not every consumer can make choices when it comes to what products they buy. So, RAN is asking that companies ensure responsible sourcing of palm oil, in other words, palm oil not produced with deforestation or exploitation. [We can motivate others through our collective power: we have a voice as consumers and together we can hold corporations accountable by demanding change.](#)

PF: How do you think the palm oil issue could achieve more publicity and attract more attention?

CM: Climate change is a major issue that has been gaining more attention globally as climate disasters increase in frequency and severity and people begin to feel the effects of global warming. Most of the public and mainstream discussions revolve around stopping fossil fuels and transitioning to renewable energy. This is incredibly important work that must be done but, in my opinion, is only half of the solution. The truth is the fight to save rainforests and stop Conflict Palm Oil is also a fight against climate change. But we cannot stop catastrophic climate change without keeping forests standing because they absorb and keep safe massive amounts of carbon from our atmosphere. Given palm oil is a driver of deforestation, I think the issue can gain more publicity if we can insert it into the growing and urgent conversation about climate change.

PF: What, in your experience, are some of the most effective ways to raise awareness about the palm oil issue?

CM: In my experience, most people are motivated by positive rather than doomsday stories. Showing people the beauty and values of the rainforest and the species that call it home can be very motivating because people can see what is at risk of being lost. It is also effective to share stories from communities and plantation workers whose lives are impacted by Conflict Palm Oil. Raising awareness can be as simple as people having conversations with each other and sharing why they care about palm oil and forests. It can also be very effective when these stories are featured by high-profile media outlets.

PF: In the face of such a big problem and a somewhat indifferent public reaction, how do you stay motivated?

CM: I get to meet and work alongside some of the most inspirational forest and human rights activists, in particular many hard-working people on the ground in Indonesia where Conflict Palm Oil has been rapidly expanding for decades. These people often risk their lives to defend their forests and their rights, which keeps me motivated daily.

PF: What was your first experience with an orangutan like?

CM: I first saw an orangutan in the wild and lush rainforests of Indonesia's Leuser Ecosystem. The orangutan was high up in the trees, but I could see her eyes and it was magical to witness her beauty and grace in person. I was incredibly excited, and I remember my eyes tearing up in awe of her presence.

PF: What are a couple palm oil free products that you love?

CM: I am really lucky to have access to a farmer's market where I love getting fresh, seasonal fruits and veggies from local farmers – everything is naturally palm oil free!

Are you an activist who works to help save orangutans and the rainforest? Contact us at orangutangang.org@gmail.com and we could interview you for this newsletter!

To learn more, view merchandise, sign petitions, and take the palm oil free pledge, please visit our website at www.orangutangang.org.