Recommendation on Conservation Units of Orangutans in the Context of Re-introduction

In light of recent genomics-based phylogeographic analyses of orangutan samples collected throughout their current range (Krützen et al. 2014), the orangutan scientists and conservation practitioners assembled at a symposium on “Great Ape Re-introduction: Conservation and Welfare Perspectives” (IPS Congress 2014) recommend an amendment to the current IUCN guidelines for re-introduction of great apes (Beck et al. 2007), with regard to orangutans.

The patterns recently discovered are:

1. A clear and deep separation between Sumatran and Bornean orangutans, warranting the continued recognition of two distinct species, i.e. totally separated conservation management, *in situ* as well as *ex situ*.

2. Concerning **Bornean orangutans**: Their very recent origin, their relatively modest extant genetic nuclear diversity, and the documented paraphyly of both mitochondrial and Y-chromosomal lineages with respect to the three currently recognised subspecies (*Pongo pygmaeus pygmaeus*, *P. p. wurmbii*, *P. p. morio*) no longer warrants strictly separate management for re-introduction purposes, and thus, no mandatory genetic testing. **In particular, it is recommended that rehabilitant orangutans should not obligatorily be repatriated to different locations within Borneo, based on their genetic makeup.** However, where programmes voluntarily perform genetic tests, only peer-reviewed validated tests can be accepted to decide taxonomic affiliation and the location suitable to re-introduce a particular orangutan.

3. In **Sumatran orangutans**, research revealed a deep separation between the populations North and South of Lake Toba for both nuclear and mitochondrial markers. The taxonomic implications of this research and their ramifications for conservation and management are still being discussed.

Approved by the IUCN SSC Primate Specialist Group, April 2015

**References**
