

CHIKITA UPDATE

Date arrived at Sepilok Rehabilitation Centre	30th November 2010
Age on arrival	1 month old
Sex	Female
Weight on arrival	1.75kg

Although Chikita has been slow to gain confidence at the Outdoor Nursery, over the last 6 months she has started to take her lessons more seriously.

Chikita's rehabilitation journey has been a steep learning curve and she has struggled at times with being brave enough to explore on her own. The adult female orangutans in the Kabili reserve can be very protective of their babies and are quick to tell Sepilok's youngsters to keep out of their way. Chikita has learnt to be wary of these orangutans and can be nervous whenever they are near. However, a new addition to the Outdoor Nursery seems to have given Chikita her courage back! Baby Peanut recently graduated from the Indoor Nursery and his company has given Chikita the encouragement she needs.

With her new adventurous friend, Chikita has recently been seen travelling 60 metres into the forest to follow Peanut, not wanting to miss out on any fun. By having other young orangutans to play with, Chikita is practicing the skills she will need for the future and is especially enjoying climbing higher into the tree-tops in order to reach the other youngsters. In orangutans, the ligaments connecting their legs and hips are much more flexible than in humans, allowing them to move easily and quickly through the branches. It is very positive to see that Chikita is starting to build up and strengthen these muscles along with her confidence, as these are both vital for her independent future in the wild.

Despite Chikita's promising progress during her lessons, she is well known for being Sepilok's drama-queen and continues to live up to her reputation! Like any 6 year old, if Chikita decides that she doesn't want to take part in her training session she will often throw a temper tantrum and not even Peanut can persuade her to continue. More worryingly, Chikita has recently been spending some time on the ground. This behaviour is strongly discouraged as the soil in tropical areas can contain harmful bacteria which can be very dangerous for young orangutans. Due to this, Chikita recently developed a fungal infection on her hands which is a quite common problem in wet and humid areas. In the wild some orangutans have been found to rub their fur with a specific plant known to have antibacterial properties, which can help when they are poorly. Chikita lost her mother at a very young age, so has had a very limited time to understand how to survive in the rainforest. It is very important that she concentrates on what her carers are teaching her.

The carers and training coordinators at Sepilok are dedicated to helping the young orangutans through their rehabilitation so that they can return to the forest where they belong. If Chikita continues to follow the example of her Nursery-mates, her skills should advance well. We will be watching Chikita's progress very closely to see how she gets on!