



HUMANE SOCIETY INTERNATIONAL™



Sun Bear Release in Borneo



Winkie Pam climbing a tree. Image courtesy of FNPF

In November 2003 our project partner in Borneo, Friends of the National Park Foundation, were given a young sun bear for release into the Tanjung Puting National Park where our orangutan rehabilitation centre is located.

Bears are particularly hard to rehabilitate to the wild and there have been no successful releases documented.

We initially established that the sun bear, now known as Winkie Pam, was healthy and recorded its weight, size, claw length and then contacted Dr Gabriella Frederickson who is apparently the only person to have had any success with sun bear release. She advised us on how we might go about designing a sun bear release program. Essentially however, we expected the rehabilitation and

release progress would be a slow one taking many years.

For the first four weeks Winkie was isolated in quarantine. During this time we tried to wean her off her porridge diet and introduced her to chopped fruit, then whole fruit and provided her with termite-infested wood, which she loved. We then transferred Winkie to the planned release site and after giving her some milk and food we opened the cage. After some hesitation she came out and tried to climb the tree beside her cage but could only climb one metre before falling.

She spent the day exploring, breaking open tree trunks, searching for termites and chasing our vets. She was not keen to return to her cage that evening and we had to use milk to entice her in.

On the second day she became even more confident and explored within a 100 metre radius of her cage. She continued to try and climb trees but continually failed. Come evening she was unwilling to re-enter her cage, refused the fruit and milk offered and the staff decided to leave her out.

The following morning Winkie was nowhere to be found. As the weeks went by we encountered traces of her digging holes, and found sleeping sites. We have now seen her several times and although she has lost some weight she appears very fit and healthy.

This is incredibly exciting news as we seem to have successfully released an ex-captive sun bear into the wild for the first time. When her survival is assured we will bring more sun bears into the park for wild release. ■