

Now on the iPad: Apps for Orangutans

From VOA Learning English, this is the TECHNOLOGY REPORT in Special English.

Humans are not the only ones who like to use tablet computers. The nonprofit organization Orangutan Outreach has started a program called Apps for Apes using Apple’s iPad. Orangutan Outreach was started by Richard Zimmerman and is based in New York City. He began the organization six years ago with the goal of protecting orangutans in the wild.

The organization started Apps for Apes one year ago. The program introduces the Apple iPad to orangutans in zoos. Apps for Apes has three goals. The first goal is to provide interesting activities for captive orangutans. The second goal is to raise awareness among zoo visitors about how smart these animals are. The third goal is to urge people to visit Orangutan Outreach’s website, redapes.org, to learn how they can help protect orangutans in the wild.

Orangutan Outreach says the iPad is a perfect device for the animal because of the touchscreen technology. With some assistance, the orangutans are able to use different apps to listen to music, play games and do other activities.

Mr. Zimmerman describes what has been reported by zoos on the reaction of the apes to seeing and using the tablets.

“The young orangutans are very curious, and they go to it immediately. The females seem to be the quickest learners. Some of the big males, they’re not scared, but they’re curious as to what this strange thing is. And they spend a little time watching it from a distance.”

Mr. Zimmerman says the program could affect the behavior of orangutans, but it is too early to know. However, he tells us about one male orangutan at the Milwaukee, Wisconsin, zoo named Tommy.

“First he didn’t want anything to do with it. But he would watch from the back of his enclosure as the zoo keepers worked with the other orangutans. He would gradually move closer. In general, Tommy is a very shy orangutan. But since the iPad has been introduced, his behavior has mellowed in a way and he has gotten more accustomed to being near people. And he now actually likes the iPad, and he likes to use it. So there’s been a change in his actual personality, and we think it’s due to the iPad use.”

The program was first launched at the Milwaukee County Zoo. It has expanded to more than 10 other zoos as well as a rescue center for apes in the United States and Canada, and is growing worldwide.