

Apps for Apes: Orangutans Love the iPad

Hello, and welcome to "As It Is," our daily magazine show for people learning American English.

I'm Christopher Cruise in Washington.

Today on the program, we visit with some apes who really like a tablet computer that many people also like: an Apple iPad.

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Apes Use Apps, Too

It seems that human beings are not the only ones who like to use tablet computers. The nonprofit organization Orangutan Outreach has created a computer application called Apps for Apes using Apple's iPad.

Richard Zimmerman began Orangutan Outreach six years ago with the goal of protecting orangutans in the wild. The group launched Apps for Apes last year.

Kim Varzi has more on the man, his organization, and the app...

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, the quickest learners. Some of the big males, are, are -- they’re not scared, but they’re curious as to what this strange thing is. And they, they spend a little time watching it from a distance.”

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

You’ve Got Questions, We’ve Got Answers...

Many listeners expressed interest in Apps for Apes when we first broadcast this story. They asked a lot of questions, so we decided to answer them.

But first, we here at Learning English had our own question -- how should we say the name of the ape? June Simms tells us...

Many people wrongly say “orangutang” -- with a “g” at the end. Maybe because orangutans are orange, people relate the name to the color. But there is no connection. Orangutan Outreach’s Richard Zimmerman explains where the name came from.

“People in Malaysia and Indonesia would say ‘orang hu tan’ and it’s actually, it doesn’t mean orange. ‘Orang’ is the Malay or Indonesian word for man or human, and ‘utan’ comes from ‘hutan’ with an ‘h,’ which means forest. So essentially, orangutan means ‘person of the forest.’”

One of our listeners asked how orangutans would react to seeing another orangutan using the iPad when they themselves are not using it. Mr. Zimmerman explains that the orangutans all want to use the tablet when they see it. This desire could come from wanting the same attention that the caretaker gives the ape using the device.

“At the Center for Great Apes in Florida, is, when we do the enrichment sessions with Mari -- a female orangutan -- Pongo, with whom she, she lives, who is a big male, he gets jealous and wants the attention. So he comes running over and wants to use the iPad.”

Mr. Zimmerman adds that the orangutans do recognize the iPad, but to know what they are thinking is a bit more difficult.

Any mind readers out there who can tell us what a great ape is thinking? Or has someone developed an app for that, too?

The First Solo Flight Around the World Was 80 Years Ago...

Finally, 80 years ago -- July 22nd, 1933 -- American Wiley Post completed the first solo flight around the world. It took him seven days, 18 hours and 45 minutes to complete the 25,000-kilometer-long trip.

Robert van der Linden is with the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, DC. He says the flight made history, but not just because it was the first time anyone had flown around the world by themselves.

“More importantly, at least from our perspective, was his use of technology in the aircraft, particularly the automatic pilot -- what he called ‘Mechanical Mike’ -- and the automatic direction-finding radio equipment, which enabled him to navigate much better. And, obviously, with the auto[matic] pilot, greatly reduced his workload during the flight.”

Sadly, Wiley Post’s story did not end happily. He was killed in 1935 when the airplane he was flying crashed in Alaska. Also killed in the crash was his close friend, the American humorist Will Rogers.

And that’s “As It Is.” We hope you enjoyed our program today.



Thanks to Kim Varzi, who wrote the program, and to Kim and June Simms, who presented it.

Every day on "As It Is" we explore the latest events and report on issues that concern you. We would love to know what you want to hear on the show. Write to us at:

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I'm Christopher Cruise, and that's "As It Is" on The Voice of America.