



Pat in the cage with Bernie and Wawang

Changing direction and promoting conservation through film and personal action

By Brenda Whately

Patrick Rouxel
Class of 1984
UWCSEA 1982–1984

Changing direction is not new to Patrick Rouxel. Having achieved a BA in Humanities from the University of California at Berkeley, he decided to pursue a medical degree in Paris. After three years of medical school he knew it wasn't right for him so he went on to complete a further BA at the Sorbonne, this time in Comparative Literature. Since then, Patrick's career has taken a couple of further changes in direction, and may be about to take another.

In 1993 Patrick began working in the film industry, specialising in the production of CGI (computer generated imagery) and special effects, eventually becoming a special effects supervisor for feature films. After 10 years he began to yearn for something else. He says, "I wanted to give more meaning to my life." In 2003, he made a trip back to Asia, and seeing the extent of the deforestation in Sumatra he decided to use his film-making expertise to raise awareness about the plight of wildlife suffering from human destruction of its habitat. In 2004 he produced *Tears of Wood*, a silent film about the Indonesian rainforest and the orangutans that inhabited it from a male orangutan's

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point of view. In 2005 he created a documentary set in Cameroon about forest monitoring. In 2005 his film *Losing Tomorrow* was a return to the Indonesian rainforest with an insight into the logging, pulp and paper, and palm oil industries and their effect on the forest. He then filmed the reactions of students, teachers and villagers who had watched the film and created an eight-minute open letter film to the President of Indonesia called *Dear M. President*. In 2007 he was commissioned

by WWF Gabon to produce *The Cathedral Forest*, a film about the trade in elephant tusks in the forest of Minkebe. In 2009 he travelled back to Indonesia where he produced a film



Green

called *Green*, which has won a number of global awards, including "Best of Festival" at the two most acclaimed wildlife film festivals, Jackson Hole in the USA and Wildscreen in the UK. It is a powerful story of a female orangutan named Green who has lost her home, her child and her will to live, told from her point of view.

In late 2009, Patrick moved to Brazil to create a number of documentaries on subjects such as forest-fire-fighters in the Amazon, and the harsh impact of the cattle and soy industries on the rainforest in a film called *Alma*. Then it was back to Africa for a film about a patch of forest in the Congo, home to gorillas, chimpanzees and elephants, to persuade authorities to prevent logging there. Back in Indonesia in 2011, he created a short film to help put an end to the use of 'dancing macaques' and in 2012 he moved on to films promoting awareness of the Indonesian sun bear.

"We spent a whole year together in the forest."

Patrick was born in France but lived in Kuala Lumpur from the time he was five years of age until he came to Singapore as a young teen, first to the French school and then to UWCSEA. For Project Week, he travelled to Sabah in Borneo, where he says he first fell in love with the Indonesian rainforest and its wildlife. He says, "At UWCSEA I had opportunities for discovery that I wouldn't have had in another school. Even so, my deep understanding of the gravity of the environmental situation world-wide, didn't come until later."

Patrick is now spending his time between Indonesia and France where he is working with, and producing a

film about sun bears. His deep interest in them began somewhat accidentally. In 2011 while in Indonesia to film some orangutan rescues by an NGO there, he heard of a sun bear cub being held in a local government office. On arrival he found a tiny, sick cub in a box. He convinced the official to let him take it to a clinic and in the process of caring for the orphan, he became quite attached to it. After it recovered, he took some advice on how to release it back into the wild, living with the cub in the forest and staying close until it felt comfortable enough to go off on its own. He did this for three months until it disappeared and he has not seen him again. As the cub was not tagged, he doesn't know what became of him. However, when he heard of two more cubs at an NGO that needed to be released, he felt he should try again. This time he used tracking implants.

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Within six weeks, the male was killed by another wild sun bear, but the female made it. He says, "We spent a whole year together in the forest until she began to get more independent and now after two years, she is still out there, living her life. She comes back to camp every so often, eats, sleeps under cover on rainy nights and then heads back off." Patrick attributes his becoming a foster mother to these cubs to the fact that he has no children of his own. "I gave my love to the cubs as if they were my own children and they have given me a lot back in return—a magical relationship with an animal, free and wild at heart."

More recently, coming across three bears, Desi, Kevin and Hilda in cages at Orangutan Foundation International (OFI), too old and habituated to mankind to be re-introduced to the wild, Patrick took action. "Every day I got rotting logs from the nearby forest to give to the bears. They loved ripping through them to get to the termites and cockroaches. They just wanted to play and be occupied. With approval from OFI, I added extensions to Kevin's cage to make it more spacious and comfortable and I put all the bears together. They became friends right away and it was blissful to watch them play."

Patrick says, "Desi, Kevin and Hilda are victims of deforestation and human greed, and have done nothing to deserve life imprisonment. They were lucky to be handed over to OFI, and are lucky to be together, but they are in need of space and things to do." Again with the approval of OFI, Patrick has created a one-hectare forest enclosure next to the Orangutan Care Centre where the three will be released. He has also spent the last three years filming these and other sun bears and the resultant documentary is in post-production.

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Knowing of another eight captive sun bears that need help, and knowing of only one so-called sun bear sanctuary in Indonesia that he says looks more like death row than a sanctuary for its 50 bears, Patrick has created a non-profit organisation called *Help the Bears* and plans to do exactly that: help captive sun bears in dire need of better living conditions. He is also considering taking over the management of the sanctuary or creating a new one. He says: "After university, I did 10 years of special effects, then 10 years of film making—it's now time for me to give the next 10 years of my life to the sun bears. I feel so close to them, I just can't move on to something else."

To view the film *Green*, visit <http://www.greenthefilm.com>

To view the film *Alma*, visit <http://www.almathefilm.com>

To learn more about Patrick's sun bear enclosure: <http://help3sunbears.blogspot.com>



Bernie

To contact Patrick, please find him on the alumni website or check with the Alumni department.