



KERATAN AKHBAR

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ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADE

Absence of national pride in preserving wildlife heritage

A YEAR ago, TRAFFIC (the wildlife trade monitoring network) released the first-ever systematic study of wildlife trade on social media in Peninsular Malaysia.

Just half an hour's daily monitoring of 14 Facebook groups in Peninsular Malaysia for five months in 2014-2015 revealed a thriving illegal trade in iconic and threatened animals.

The study found more than 300 wild, live animals, ranging from sun bears to binturong (bearcats), offered for sale at several sites that boasted thousands of members.

It all came as a surprise because the peninsula wasn't home to the open physical wildlife

markets common in most other Southeast Asian countries.

But, one year on, a sweep of seven illegal online traders and the rescue of 49 wild animals have turned that initial shock to utter dismay. Numerous arrests and seizures since 2015 have been made, and it's clear that illicit online wildlife trade has become an insidious norm.

All the animals seized in raids last month were protected or totally-protected species and most were juvenile — two major points raised by TRAFFIC's 2016 report. This points to a disturbing disregard of the law traffickers and buyers of poached and smuggled wildlife.

It also speaks volumes about

how disconnected we are from nature. There seems to be little concern for how wild pets may have been sourced — if adults were killed to acquire juveniles or if they were stolen from our forests or another country, stuffed into suitcases and smuggled, countless along the way.

There seems to be even less understanding of the dangers that armed poachers in our jungles pose to national security, or the risk of zoonotic diseases spreading through illegal and irresponsible wild pet ownership.

Perhaps, the saddest is the absence of any national pride in preserving Malaysia's wildlife heritage.

While TRAFFIC is very en-

couraged to see that Perhilitan (the Wildlife and National Parks Department) has scaled up its enforcement efforts, this pervasive online threat — a criminal activity in which thousands of young Malaysians openly participate — is not one the department should have to fight alone.

What are social media and e-commerce sites doing to raise awareness or stem the problem?

What are postal, express mail, transport and logistics service companies doing to ensure their businesses aren't being misused to ferry wildlife?

What are other government departments and ministries that oversee these sectors doing to support enforcement agencies?

Are health and quarantine services prepared to deal with a growing population of wild animals living in homes, or released into public spaces?

Are we being too lenient with those who violate wildlife laws, and are we failing to use available legal tools as the deterrents they were meant to be?

As conservation organisations like TRAFFIC continue to monitor the trade and provide vital information to enforcement agencies at the frontlines, we urge every Malaysian to do their part as well.

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