

KERATAN AKHBAR



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WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

BACKING FOR POLICE WAR ON POACHERS

Their involvement in battling wildlife crime crucial, says conservationist

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SABAH wildlife conservationists and traders are in support of the police stepping up their crackdown on those involved in the illegal capture of wildlife and the supply of exotic meats.

Bornean Sun Bear Conservation Centre founder and chief executive officer Dr Wong Siew Te said the involvement of the police to end wildlife crime was timely and crucial.

"(Police) giving stern warnings and reminders to poachers, traders, and restaurateurs is good... I am glad that wildlife crimes are being treated seriously now," he said.

He welcomed this as good news for both the wildlife and those who care about the issue.

The wildlife biologist was commenting on Inspector General of Police (IGP) Tan Sri Abdul Hamid Bador's statement declaring "total war" on wildlife poachers and restaurants serving exotic meats, particularly of endangered species.

Police had recently launched Op Khazanah as part of an on-

going effort to protect the nation's flora and fauna, stressing that all parties involved in the illegal capture and supply of wildlife would be arrested and prosecuted. This even includes restaurant owners who serve exotic animal dishes.

In the context of Sabah, Wong observed that the police did not go after exotic meat suppliers aggressively in the past, noting that the Sabah Wildlife Department was the one making the call most of the time.

He stressed the importance of building a strong cooperation between the police and wildlife conservationists in Sabah, noting that the room for such cooperation requires improvement but was heading in the right direction.

"Wildlife crimes have to be treated equal to those involving human beings. For example, all poaching cases should be treated the same as murder cases involving human beings.

"Law enforcement agencies need to collaborate with others in order to have the resources needed to bring poachers to justice.

"For example, panda poachers have been given the death sentence in China. In short, treat



Bornean Sun Bear Conservation Centre founder and chief executive officer Dr Wong Siew Te with a rescued sun bear last year. He says the police crackdown on wildlife crimes is timely. PIC COURTESY OF BSBC

wildlife crimes seriously," said Wong, adding that he was also in support of whipping wildlife criminals as proposed by Hamid in September.

Meanwhile, Danau Girang Field Centre director Dr Benoit Goossens said the police's stern

warning would definitely serve as a reminder to the public on the consequences of their actions.

"I don't remember the police being this aggressive in the past. It is therefore a great move and I can only praise the police for being proactive in this matter.

Hopefully, those words will be followed by action," he said.

Goossens, who is a wildlife conservation biologist, stressed that better and more coordinated intelligence should be put in place to catch poachers and exotic meat traders.