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Enforcement key to protecting Sabah wildlife

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KOTA KINABALU: The lack of enforcement on crime against wildlife in Sabah is contributing to the continuous killing and poaching of protected species, according to a senior official.

Scientist and director of the Danau Girang Field Centre (DGFC), Dr Benoit Goossens, said the authorities needed to take action and increase enforcement if they were serious about stopping these acts.

He said it was not a lack of awareness that was making these crimes continue, adding what was needed was the full commitment of wildlife staff, government officials, security forces as well as local communities

to address the issue.

While acknowledging that police and the Sabah Wildlife Department had been very productive in relation to the two most recent elephant killing cases – one in Tawau and one in Beluran district – he said more needed to be done.

Goossens said the authorities needed to work closely with oil palm estates and increase enforcement within all estates as well.

"I believe that improving and increasing enforcement is the solution to the poaching of wildlife and elephants.

"We need to increase the boots on the ground with more rangers," he added.

Goossens said recently DGFC and the Sabah Forestry Department obtained RM4mil from Sime Darby

Foundation to increase the size of the Project team.

"We now have 25 trained rangers focusing exclusively on anti-poaching in Sabah, but we need to improve our intelligence and gather crucial information on poachers and wildlife traffickers," he said.

For this, he said DGFC obtained a grant from the US government last month to boost enforcement and forensic capacity to deter wildlife trafficking in Sabah.

"Apart from that, this grant is to set up an intelligence unit at the Sabah Wildlife Department as well as an inter-agency Sabah Wildlife Trafficking Brigade," he said.

On Sept 25, a bull elephant was found dead tied to a tree by a riverbank of Sungai Uduh, Tawau, with its body mangled with over 70 bullet

wounds while its two tusks sawn off.

Six people including two Felda settlers and a staff were subsequently arrested but none have been charged under the Wildlife Conservation Enactment as investigators are still trying to make their case as strong as possible for prosecution.

Later on Oct 20, another adult bull pygmy elephant was found dead with its tusks missing at a plantation in the Beluran district of Sabah.

There were several bullet wounds on the body but investigators are still trying to ascertain its cause of death as the wounds did not seem fatal.

A plantation guard was called in to facilitate investigations.