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Giving wildlife a helping hand

Volunteers build rope bridge for monkeys to cross road safely

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IN A bid to prevent wildlife deaths on roads, a group known as Langur Project Penang (LPP) has built Malaysia's first urban wildlife "canopy bridge" to help them cross the road safely in Teluk Bahang.

A 5m-long firehose hanging 12m from the ground now allows dusky langurs, spectacle leaf monkeys and dusky leaf monkeys to travel between the fragmented forest and Teluk Bahang town to look for food.

A Mickey Mouse toy was placed at the other end of the pole to attract the primates into using the bridge, known as "Ah Lai's crossing".

LPP team leader Yap Jo Leen, 29, said many Malaysian primates were in danger of losing their natural habitat due to rapid development.

"They are suffering from habitat loss and this has driven them to risk venturing into urban areas for food," she said.

"We want to promote a wildlife-friendly development to prevent sad cases of road deaths and local extinction of wildlife.

"If the wildlife can share their forest trails with us, let us share our roads with them by making them more wildlife-friendly," said Yap, a PhD student in zoology at the School of Biological Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM).

Yap said such "bridges" were used in Australia, Brazil and India to reconnect separated forest patches or habitat fragments to allow safe passage for small animals.

In Sabah, she said orang utans also use rope bridges to cross the Kinabatangan river.

"We are working with the local community and governmental and non-governmental stakeholders to make this project a national long-term conservation effort.

"Besides, the animals are targets of active illegal poaching and wildlife trade in Malaysia as there is high demand in the black market.

"They are illegally hunted for their meat for use in traditional medicine and are marketed as exotic animals to be kept as pets," she said.

To safeguard these arboreal animals, LPP built Malaysia's first urban wildlife canopy bridge on Feb 28 this year to help them cross roads safely.

USM primatologist Dr Nadine Ruppert described the "bridge" as an exciting moment for wildlife conservation in Malaysia.

"This bridge highlights how a few committed individuals can make a positive impact for animals in human-impacted habitats.

"I'm looking forward to seeing more canopy bridges in Malaysia in the future," she said.



Primates lurking near the canopy bridge built by volunteers in Teluk Bahang, Penang.



Volunteers building Malaysia's first urban wildlife canopy bridge along the busy coastal road of Teluk Bahang, to help primates cross roads safely.

The project was done in collaboration with Animal Project & Environmental Education (APE Malaysia), funded by Disney Conservation Fund and The Rufford Foundation, and supported by Tropical Spice Garden with permit obtained from Penang Public Works Department.

APE Malaysia representative Mazrul Mahadzir said they chose firehose because of its durability. "This material is widely used in wildlife centres as it can withstand the animal's strength and is suitable for extended use over long periods of time.

"Most importantly, by using firehose, we also promote recycling and upcycling, which is a win-win for both wildlife and the environment," he said.