



KERATAN AKHBAR

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Negative consequences of feeding wild animals

I AM surprised by the advice offered by the Taiping Zoo and Night Safari director Dr Kevin Lazarus to tourists not to overfeed wild brahminy kites, "Don't overfeed brahminy kites" (*The Star*, Jan 15). I would have expected an expert like him to strongly object to the practice of feeding wild birds and other wild animals.

The advice given not to "overfeed" the brahminy kites is also difficult to measure and act upon because tourists and tour boat operators are not veterinarians or wildlife ecologists and are therefore not able to estimate how much food to give and what would constitute overfeeding.

They would not know if other tour boat operators or tourists who had come earlier in the day had already fed the birds. It is difficult, if not impossible, to draw up guidelines on appropriate and sufficient feeding of wild birds and expect tourists and tour boat operators to adhere to these guidelines.

Furthermore, tour boat operators in Pulau Langkawi, Kuala Sepetang and similar areas provide the brahminy kites and eagles with the cheapest food possible, namely chicken skin, entrails and gizzards, which are sourced from broiler farms that use antibiotics and growth promoters.

This would have an adverse impact on the wild birds' health and immune systems in the long run.

As the good doctor himself acknowledged, feeding wild birds with chicken skin and fat would result in calcium deficiency, obesity and ultimately population decline as the eggs of the wild birds may break during incubation due to the aforementioned calcium deficiency.

The well-being of wild birds and other



wildlife should be given priority over the trivial whims of tourists who wish to be entertained.

Wildlife experts and the authorities should be very firm about not permitting the feeding of any kind of wildlife.

The practice of feeding wild animals cause more harm than good and should be prohibited. The Department of Wildlife and National Parks (Perhilitan) and Forestry Department should apprehend

and fine offenders who ignore the signs not to feed wildlife.

Feeding wild animals alters their natural behaviour and makes them less afraid of humans. This could expose them to greater risks of being trapped, poached or poisoned.

Almost every human-wildlife conflict incident that we read about starts with the narrative of well-intentioned people feeding wild monkeys, boars, bears, sharks or other animals, and ends with a dead or injured

human or animal.

Fed animals also end up being killed when they enter human territory for more food.

Diseases and pathogens also spread more easily among wild birds and animals when they congregate to feed. Animals that are usually solitary or socialise only with their own species end up having increased

inter-species contact when they congregate at feeding sites, and may contract salmonella and other pathogens when they come in contact with the saliva and faeces of other animals. This is what happened to the white ibis population in Georgia (USA), and we should make every effort possible to ensure this does not happen to our own wild bird and animal populations.

I am aware that tour boat operators rely on activities such as the feeding of brahminy kites and white-bellied sea eagles to give their business a competitive edge and provide an interactive experience for their clients. It is only natural that tourists would want to feel as if they have had close contact with a wild species, or have "helped" a local species by providing food.

I propose setting up hatcheries to increase native fish stocks, and then getting tourists to pay to release the fish fry or fingerlings into the sea. This would not only replenish native fish populations but also provide job opportunities for local communities.

Tourists like to feel that they are "giving back" to the local community and wildlife, and releasing fish fry may be a feasible alternative to feeding wild birds with inappropriate food.

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