



KEMENTERIAN TENAGA DAN SUMBER ASLI

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4 News

JOHOR

Planting a solution to human-elephant conflict

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Agricultural community involvement in animal conservation key to resolving issue, says expert

THE agricultural community must be roped in if human-elephant conflicts are to be addressed effectively.

University of Nottingham in Malaysia's Management and Ecology of Malaysian Elephants research project principal investigator Dr Wong Ee Phin said there was a need to look at the issue holistically.

"These conflicts are complex as elephants are strong and smart and can work out ways to handle any barriers put up to keep them out.

"The real issue is the rapid fragmentation of the forest as these animals do not have safe passage to move from one forest patch to another that is away from people and homes," she told *StarMetro*.

She said this would jeopardise efforts in mitigating human-elephant conflict as the mammals might wander into villages and residential areas.

She pointed out that a lot of important ecological corridors in Johor were almost severed as these areas had been developed.

Wong stressed that when forested areas were greatly reduced and the landscape filled with people, this would increase interaction between humans and animals.

"If it is not managed carefully, it may result in more conflicts.

"However, I do see a way forward but we will need to bring in the agricultural community, including plantation owners and smallholders, to help support elephant conservation," she said.

Wong said that ultimately, local



Leading elephants to a safe place

The six-month-old, Johor Elephant Sanctuary hopes to reduce unwanted

StarMetro's report on May 20.

stakeholders were needed to make it happen.

"We need to increase their knowledge of the issue."

She said elephants played an important role in Malaysia's ecosystem.

She described them as "forest planters" as they helped to disperse seeds in the rainforest.

"Several tree species rely mainly on large animals to help in seed

dispersal, as smaller wildlife will not be able to consume the seeds whole and defecate it in an intact state so that they will be viable for germination.

"Other smaller wildlife may eat the flesh of the fruit but when they bite the seed, they will kill it.

"Or they move the seeds over short distances, leaving them exposed to diseases near the parent tree," she explained.

Seeds in elephant dung have a high chance of germination and when the seedlings grow into trees and produce fruit, they will benefit not only wildlife but also indigenous communities, who depend on fruit trees such as wild durian, said Wong.

"Elephants are the largest animals on land, so wherever they move, they influence the forest around them.

"They can create microhabitats and benefit other wildlife. For example, their dung provides nutrients for insects and vegetation.

"When elephants dig the ground for salt licks or for other reasons, they make small ponds filled with rainwater that can be used by frogs and other wildlife," she added.

On the Johor Elephant Sanctuary (JES), Wong said since it housed state Wildlife and National Parks Department (Perhilitan) staff, they would be able to respond faster to complaints in the area.

On May 20, *StarMetro* reported that the JES in Kota Tinggi was playing an important role in helping to reduce the number of clashes between humans and elephants in the state.

Johor Perhilitan director Salman Saaban had said the department received 514 complaints on elephants in the past five years but hoped to halve that number now that JES was operational.