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WILDLIFE CRIME

TIGERS EXTINCT BY 2022?

Protecting the Malayan tiger also safeguards ecosystem, says expert

NURADZIMMAH DAIM
AND HANA NAZ HARUN
KUALA LUMPUR
news@nst.com.my

WILL Malaysians be able to live with guilt over their failure to protect the Malayan tiger if the species becomes extinct?

In posing the question, conservationist Dr Mark Rayan Darmaraj said with only 200 Malayan tigers left in the wild, the species could go extinct in two to three years.

He said there was an urgent need to act now for the species to have any chance of survival.

"We will lose our tigers in two or three years, and I am being optimistic here."

"If we leave things as they are, the Malayan tiger could be driven into extinction even faster."

"By taking care of tigers, the apex predator, we are also protecting the ecosystem."

"The abundance of tigers is a sign of a healthy ecosystem," he told the *New Straits Times*.

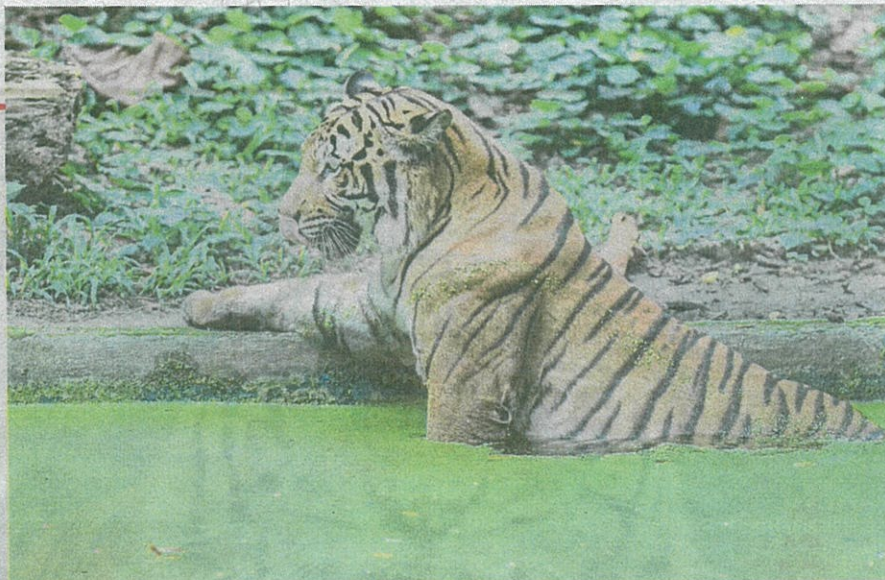
He said the existing programmes and initiatives had yet to achieve the desired results as evident in the declining number of wildlife species.

Darmaraj, who is WWF-Malaysia Peninsular Malaysia Terrestrial Conservation Programme's Tiger Landscape lead, lamented the lack of coordination between agencies.

He suggested that the government establish a wildlife crime unit, a team which specialised in investigations and intelligence gathering.

This, he said, would boost the team's professionalism and ensure that legal action was followed through right from the evidence collection stage to the prosecution process.

This team, he said, could gather intelligence on poaching syndicates, which were part of the



There are only 200 Malayan tigers left in the wild. PIC BY AIZUDDIN SAAD.

larger illegal wildlife trade network.

"In most reported cases, those who were prosecuted for hunting endangered species could have been working for foreign syndicates."

"Cracking this should be made a priority, apart from penalising those who are guilty of committing wildlife crimes."

Government agencies, Darmaraj said, should work together to address illegal hunting through concerted efforts.

"In this respect, I applaud the Water, Land and Natural Resources Ministry's initiative to enrol the army to curb illegal hunting. But this has to be mobilised soon. There is no time to waste if we want to see the tigers survive."

To demonstrate its seriousness in tackling the issue, he said the government should establish a high-level committee task force, headed by the prime minister that could compel relevant agencies and stakeholders to support conservation efforts.

He said one of the factors which had driven wildlife species, including the Malayan tiger, to the brink of extinction was poaching, which contributed RM23 billion to the illegal wildlife trade every year.

Darmaraj said combating wildlife crimes must be made a priority, as it posed the largest threat to the survival of the species.

"Other factors include the scarcity of food caused by loss of habitat. We have handled a few

cases in Kelantan where the tigers were known to have attacked villagers.

We found out that the tigers have ventured out of the forest because of the lack of food source, mainly the sambar deer. Sickly tigers or those injured by snares have resorted to attacking humans.

"We worked with villagers to prevent tigers from encroaching on rubber plantations by clearing the areas and putting up a perimeter fence."

He said efforts such as the breeding of sambar deer could ensure the survival of the species.

"The onus is on us to ensure the survival of our wildlife species. If the Malayan tigers become extinct, we will be held accountable and answerable to future generations."

Heightened enforcement brings down number of wildlife crimes

KUALA LUMPUR: The government's efforts in battling the illegal wildlife trade appears to be paying off as a significant decline in crime cases involving wildlife has been observed.

Wildlife protection organisations have long placed Malaysia as among the world's primary transit countries for wildlife smugglers.

However, a gradual increase in enforcement efforts has led to bigger seizures of wildlife parts and arrests of syndicate members.

Figures gleaned from data.gov.my, managed by the Malaysian Administrative Modernisation and Management Planning Unit (MAMPU), showed that from 2016, overall crime cases involving wildlife showed a gradual decline in almost all areas.

In 2015, there were 1,371 criminal cases involving wildlife. These included the possession or use of illegal animal parts (175 cases), encroachment (11 cases)

and smuggling (34 cases).

The following year, the number of cases involving the possession or use of animal parts rose to 353, while smuggling cases jumped to 59.

However, in total, the number of wildlife-related criminal cases that year dropped to 1,329.

In 2017, a massive blitz by agencies led to a large number of seizures.

Over the course of several weeks, the authorities seized thousands of elephant tusks, pangolin scales, live animals and wildlife parts.

The Sabah Customs Department seized three tonnes of elephant tusks and five tonnes of pangolin scales from Nigeria bound for China, at the Sepangar Port on Aug 29.

A month earlier, on July 29, the authorities seized eight tonnes of pangolin scales at the same port.

On Aug 26, National Wildlife Department (Perhilitan) officers stopped a Vietnamese national at



A gradual increase in enforcement efforts has led to bigger seizures of wildlife parts and arrests of syndicate members. PIC BY ASRIZAL ARIS

Sungai Siput, Perak, with more than 200 suspected wildlife parts of totally-protected species, such as 188 pieces of Sun Bear claws, 21 pieces of Sun Bear teeth, 17 pieces

of tiger claws, eight pieces of tiger teeth, one piece of Sambar Deer, and parts of other unidentified wildlife.

The agency believed the Viet-

namese national was not acting alone and that investigations would focus on flushing out the network of local players dealing in the parts of threatened species.

That same year, the Sabah Forestry Department announced its intention to set up a dedicated wildlife enforcement team to tackle poachers.

The team would be trained in the use of firearms and be stationed at priority areas like the Tabin wildlife reserve, Kinabatangan and Ulu Segama.

In total, 2017 saw 1,545 criminal cases involving possession or use of illegal animal parts, 16 smuggling cases and 31 trade-related cases, bringing the total criminal cases for the year to 1,618.

Last year saw a reduction in the number of cases for possession or use of illegal animal parts (1,132 cases), as well as trade, which went down to 18 cases from 31 the previous year, with the year's total wildlife-related crime cases ending at 1,175.