



KEMENTERIAN TENAGA DAN SUMBER ASLI

## KERATAN SURAT KHABAR

SURAT KHABAR	:	THE SUN		
TARIKH	:	2/6/2021	MUKA SURAT	: 9
JABATAN	:	PERHILITAN		

### Working together to tackle urban human, wildlife conflicts

**PUBLIC** outrage over the recent culling of the dusky leaf monkeys in Port Dickson, Negri Sembilan marks the rise of an "eco-wakening" in this country. Essentially, people care about their wildlife.

Apart from the public, multiple non-governmental organisations have voiced their concerns over the incident and the measures taken against the dusky langurs, protected under the Wildlife Conservation Act 2010.

Perhilitan, the agency responsible for the culling responded with a statement saying that only seven aggressive individuals were culled, and not 20 as reported.

According to the statement, the leaf monkeys in this particular area have attacked humans three times in the past with one case resulting in serious injuries.

These reported attacks on humans are examples of human-wildlife conflict, and we must address the issue appropriately.

WWF-Malaysia recognises that it can be challenging to balance the needs of both humans and wildlife, especially when there are human victims involved.

However, we must show empathy to both people and wildlife, and take into account their well-being and interests at the same time.

We strongly urge the authorities to collaborate further with other wildlife experts to strategically handle human-wildlife conflict, so as to cover all bases and ensure satisfactory outcomes for all parties.

We must ask ourselves: Have all other reasonable avenues been exhausted before we

take the drastic action of culling the wildlife involved? Culling must be considered only as the absolute last resort.

This devastating incident is symptomatic of the bigger problem of urban human-wildlife conflict.

Being a shy species, if the langurs had indeed been aggressive, we need to consider the possibility that this behaviour was triggered by disruptions to their environment, habitat and food resources.

WWF-Malaysia's work on nature conservation recognises that it can be challenging to balance the needs for economic development and sufficiently large natural habitat for wildlife, but there are ways to address this urban human-wildlife conflict.

More importantly, we draw upon our Living Landscapes approach that is underpinned by the three pillars of protect, produce and restore to identify possible solutions to this dilemma.

When our work started adopting this approach, critics questioned whether anybody would want to purposefully set aside land to create a wildlife corridor to connect fragmented forests.

Today, in support of conservation, there are private companies doing just that.

In Sabah, where the Living Landscapes approach has begun to be accepted, we see attempts to reconnect and restore degraded orang-utan habitats and wildlife corridors for Bornean elephants to wander through their plantations.

With this in mind, we urge the authorities to undertake an inventory of the wildlife found in

urban forests and nature reserves.

Trees such as ficus that produce fruits throughout the year, and leaf shoots suitable to the species could then be planted to enrich the habitat.

Secondly, we advocate for residents and communities to work with enforcement agencies on proper waste management to avoid animals from having to rummage through garbage bins for food.

We need to consider the possible extinction of this wildlife in the longer term.

Being isolated, they would breed among themselves and eventually lose genetic variation which would cause local extinction.

To prevent this, we need to identify suitable urban forests and establish wildlife corridors to reconnect them.

We can also identify the banks of waterways and roads with wide reserves as potential corridors to connect the urban forests. Over time, a network of interconnected urban forests could be established, allowing wildlife populations to move from place to place to breed, maintaining their genetic variation and consequently, their health.

Improving connectivity using wildlife corridors in urban areas requires collaboration between multiple parties, from the authorities to developers, with support from wildlife experts and local organisations to address the urban human-wildlife conflict.

In essence, wildlife conservation and provision of natural spaces need to be integrated into urban planning.

Public acceptance is crucial because there is a need for shared spaces between humans and wildlife.

For this to happen, education and exposure to wildlife management at all levels are critical to promote coexistence between humans and animals in urban areas.

Due to little interaction or experience with animals, many people do not understand animal behaviour.

This is why more in-depth dialogue and awareness needs to be done to educate the public on how to react to animal presence.

It also requires everyone to work together, from city halls, resident associations, civil societies, schools to corporate sectors.

Government agencies would benefit from collaborating and building rapport with the community.

A step in the right direction would be to communicate to the public their standard operating procedures (SOP) or measures taken to resolve human-wildlife conflict.

Feedback from the public could help improve the dissemination of the SOP or revisit these procedures where necessary.

Protecting wildlife is an enormous responsibility that should be shouldered by everyone, and it is our hope that, ultimately, solutions can be found which are beneficial to all parties involved.

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