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Young jumbos get new lease of life at sanctuary

TEMERLOH: Selendang, Sanum and Elly are three young elephants which have been given a new lease of life after they were nursed back to health at the Kuala Gandah National Elephant Conservation Centre (PKGK) in Lanchang here.

The three pachyderms were brought to the centre with critical injuries and a slim chance of survival, said PKGK senior wildlife assistant Saudi Sidek, 59.

Sanum, 16, had sustained injuries from a tiger attack while 16-year-old Selendang and three-year-old Elly both lost one of their fore-legs when they were caught in hunters' wire traps.

"Selendang lost her left leg, while Elly lost her right leg. Their legs were amputated by wire snares and couldn't be saved," Saudi said. Selendang, discovered in August 2010, was the centre's first case of an amputated baby elephant and proved to be a challenge.

"We were looking for ways to create a prosthetic leg for her. Her current physical built is quite different from ordinary elephants because much of her weight is on her front right foot," he said.

PKGK was set up in 1989 by the Department of Wildlife and National Parks (Perhilitan) and currently houses 32 elephants aged between three and 82.

The resident elephants are *denak* (framers) elephants – which play a significant role in the wild elephant translocation programme – for educational purposes as well as "special needs" elephants.

They were placed under the care of 80 workers, including eight people from the Che Wong Orang Asli community.

Saudi said Selendang was only two years old when she was found near a jungle in Felda Selendang in Rompin.

She was in a highly traumatised state, making it difficult for them to clean her wound, which took almost a year to heal.

"It is difficult for elephants to trust humans because it is their natural instinct as wildlife. Even if the pachyderm is very young, its strength should not be underestimated and it can turn aggressive," Saudi added.

Elly, discovered in Jeli, Kelantan, was more fortunate as the centre was able to make a prosthetic leg for her immediately, he said.

Elephant prosthetic legs are expensive and the centre expressed its gratitude to corporate donations which helped fund them.

"One prosthetic leg can reach up to a few thousand ringgit and it has to be replaced every six months because they grow bigger



Tender loving care: Elly being fed a bottle of milk by one of her carers at PKGK in Kuala Gandah, Lanchang. — Berrama

with age. Unlike Selendang, Elly seems more comfortable with her prosthetic leg.

"Perhaps this is because Elly was much younger when she was fitted with her first prosthetic leg. Selendang is quite cheeky; when she thinks no one is watching, she will remove her prosthetic foot," he said.

Saudi, who has been tending to the elephants since the 1980s, said Sanum is easy to recognise because she is the only elephant in PKGK without a tail.

She was found with injuries on 80% of her body from a tiger attack. She managed to escape the attack by entering an Orang Asli settlement in Sungai Siput, Perak.

"We thought she could not survive. Her tail was almost broken and we had to cut it off.

"When we first tried to nurse her, she was so aggressive that we had to confine her. Medicine had to be applied daily on almost her entire body. Fortunately she was very young, so the wounds did not leave any scars.

"Sanum is also known as a hero for being able to survive. She has grown from an aggressive baby elephant into a gentle giant who likes visitors," he said. — Berrama



Safe haven: Elly (left) and Selendang enjoying each other's company. — Berrama