KEMENTERIAN TENAGA DAN SUMBER ASLI

KERATAN SURAT KHABAR

SURAT KHABAR	:	THE STAR			
TARIKH	:	28.02.22	MUKA SURAT	:	6
JABATAN	:	PERHILITAN			



Thriving: Wawa is roaming freely at the Tabin Wildlife Reserve.

Brighter days ahead for Wawa the sun bear

By STEPHANIE LEE
stephanielee@thestar.com.my

KOTA KINABALU: When four-month-old Wawa the Bornean Sun Bear was rescued by wildlife rangers in 2016, she was weak, dehydrated and scared.

At just 4.5kg, the cub was found alone without her mother in a forest reserve in Pinangah in Sabah's central Telupid district.

Today, she is roaming freely at the Tabin Wildlife Reserve following her release back to the wild on Saturday.

Wildlife biologist Dr Wong Siew Te, who also manages the Bornean Sun Bear Conservation Centre in Sandakan district, said Wawa's care and growth with the centre started on March 18, 2016.

"She was first rescued and surrendered to the Sabah Wildlife Department before being handed over to us," he said when contacted.

Once at the centre, they made sure Wawa had round-the-clock care and feeding with a special milk formula.

"Sun bears live with their mothers until the age of two to three and until they are grown enough to defend themselves.

"As Wawa no longer has her mother, our bear keepers became surrogate mothers, giving it love, support, care and the knowledge needed to be released back into the forest," said Wong.

He said at the centre, they made sure the rescued cub got the enrichment programmes needed for captive sun bears as they provide positive mental and physical stimulation.

Wong said these programmes allowed Wawa to dig for insects, climb and explore the wild in the best natural way possible.

They found that Wawa has quite a big appetite and is particularly fond of fruits, termites, ants and honey.

She even made friends with another rescued cub named Dodop a year later, a companion that stuck with her until her release back to the wild.

Wong said as they prepared for its rehabilitation and release, they noticed that Wawa was not afraid to explore the wild, even when she took her first step into a forest enclosure.

He said she would always be among the bravest and quickest to run around, play in the dirt, roam the forest and climb trees whenever she was allowed to do so.

"Wawa is highly intelligent and inquisitive by nature. Climbing trees, digging for termite nests, and developing the strength and the skills she needed seem to be her favourite activities throughout the day," he said.

During the process, they discovered also that Wawa had expressed natural avoidant behaviour towards people, and barks when she sees someone approaching, thus making her one of the better candidates for release, said Wong.

She also revealed her own method of how to survive in the forest, foraging for her own food, building nests, climbing trees and recognising threats.

"She came from the wild and that is where she belongs, in the forest. It was gradually clear that she was ready to be released back into the wild," said Wong.

He added that with her release in Tabin, they were quite confident that she would easily adapt and build a life of her own, with her own species in a safe and sound environment.