KEMENTERIAN TENAGA DAN SUMBER ASLI

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Step up for tiger conservation

WWF-Malaysia is deeply saddened by the recent tragedy in Kampung Sau, Gua Musang, where a 59-year-old orang asli villager was attacked and killed by a tiger. We extend our deepest condolences to the family of the deceased. We are also devastated that the tiger had to be shot even though it was a critically endangered species.

Unfortunately, incidents of human-tiger conflict (HTC) are not uncommon in tiger range countries. HTC occurs when a wild tiger interacts with humans, their animals or livestock, resulting in an injury or death to a human, livestock or tiger.

In Russia, two wild tigers that killed three dogs on the outskirts of a town were sedated and successfully relocated to a rehabilitation centre.

In Bhutan, human-wildlife conflict is a critical issue in farming communities located near protected areas or forest reserves. Apart from measures such as the use of sound and light repellent and electric fencing, "Safe Systems" is being adopted to address this issue holistically to ensure the safety of both humans and wildlife.

In Peninsular Malaysia, our forests are home to fewer than 200 tigers. In recent months, a few from this already dwindling population have ventured closer to human settlements. With increased incidents, there is a real urgency to find a holistic way to address and manage HTC.

To do this, we must understand the nature of the tiger and the possible causes leading to HTC. Individual tigers require a large territory, which is determined mostly by the availability of prey. Across their range, tigers face unrelenting pressure from poaching, retaliatory killings, and habitat loss. They are forced to compete for space with dense and often growing human populations.

Tigers are by nature solitary unless they are courting or mothers with young cubs. The tiger hunts alone, by ambush, waiting for lone, unsuspecting prey. A tiger when threatened or already injured may exhibit more aggression to save itself.

The solution is to minimise contact between wild tigers and humans. When we stop threatening the resources required for a self-sustaining ecosystem, the coexistence between human and wildlife can be better managed.

The year 2021 had closed on a hopeful note with the announcement of the establishment of a Wildlife Crime Unit by the Royal Malaysia Police. Energy and Natural Resources Minister Datuk Seri Takiyuddin Hassan had also announced the establishment of a National Tiger Task Force and a Tigers Working Group (TWG) to look at ways to increase the population of Malayan tigers in the wild.

Together with other NGOs, WWF-Malaysia had advocated for several years to see this achieved, and now we must quickly and relentlessly move forward with the next phase of implementation – the nine strategic actions for conservation of the species approved by the Cabinet in June 2021.

The Malayan tiger is already standing close to the brink of extinction. We may be losing tigers faster than they can breed. With fewer tigers, the chances of breeding will be further reduced, and with so few remaining in the wild, the urgency to conserve each and every animal is critical.

In a few weeks, as we usher in the Year of the Tiger, my hope is that every Malaysian will seek to understand the nature and necessary existence of this critically endangered species that is our national icon, and its connection to our very own survival.

SOPHIA LIM
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