KEMENTERIAN TENAGA DAN SUMBER ASLI

KERATAN SURAT KHABAR

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SPEAK UP



COMMENT by Sophia Lim

Urgent need to manage human-tiger conflict

WWF-MALAYSIA is deeply saddened by the recent tragic incident in Kampung Sau, Gua Musang, where Anek Along, 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, despite it being a critically endangered species which we as a nation are committed to protect at all cost.

We share our concern for the safety of the villagers, and urge that best practices and necessary steps be taken to avoid further casualty, be it man or beast.

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 their livestock and this results in an injury or death to a human, livestock or tiger.

In Russia, two wild tigers responsible for killing three dogs on the outskirts of the town Vyazemskoye, were sedated and successfully relocated to the Utyos Rehabilitation Centre with the support of WWF-Russia and ANO Amur Tiger.

In Bhutan, human-wildlife conflict is a critical issue where farming communities reside close to protected areas or in reserved forests.

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 with strategies that ensure the safety of both humans and wildlife.

In Peninsular Malaysia, our forests are home to less than 200 tigers, yet in recent months, a few from this already dwindling population have ventured out of the forest, 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, the possible causes leading to HTC and expedite necessary solutions.

Individual tigers require a large territory, and the size of its territory is determined mostly by the availability of prey.

Across their range, tigers face unrelenting pressures 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 a mother with young cubs.

Preferring to shy away from humans, the tiger hunts alone, by ambush, waiting for lone, unsuspecting prey.

A tiger, when threatened or already injured, may exhibit more aggression and its natural behaviour is to defend and save itself.

The solution is to minimise contact between wild tigers and humans, however, as competition for space and habitat increases, this becomes a challenge.

It is only a matter of time before its numbers are completely wiped out from the combined threat of poaching, deforestation, habitat loss, lack of natural prey for food, injuries from snares or being hunted, leading to inability to hunt for food in the case of Awang Rasau, increased incidences of human tiger conflict and the threat of disease such as canine distemper.



The Malayan tiger is on the brink of extinction. – **BERNAMAPIX**

When we stop threatening the resources required for a self-sustaining ecosystem, the coexistence between humans and wildlife can be better managed.

So, as we work towards increasing our wild tiger numbers, we also need to look at effectively managing HTC, for the safety of the communities that live close to the forest as well as the conservation of the Malayan tiger.

Year 2021 had closed on a hopeful note with the announcement of the setup 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 to look at ways of increasing tiger population in the wild.

Together with other non-governmental organisations, we have advocated 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 the conservation of the species approved by the Cabinet in June 2021.

The Malayan tiger is already standing precariously 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 tiger is so 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.

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