KEMENTERIAN TENAGA DAN SUMBER ASLI

KERATAN SURAT KHABAR

SURAT KHABAR	:	THE STAR			
TARIKH	:	3/11/2021 (RABU)	MUKA SURAT	:	23
JABATAN	:	KeTSA			

Make room for the birds

The Star (Views) 03.11.2021_23

THE life of birds in urban areas is not easy. They are constantly under threat since their nesting sites are being demolished and they are forcibly displaced. In fact, trees that are crucial to their survival are being cut down to make way for new shopping malls, homes, parking lots, highways and power lines.

Over the past several years, priority has been given to road construction projects and concrete paving without considering the effects of the loss of trees and other vegetation on the ecosystem, especially on birds. This is happening everywhere, from big cities to towns and the countryside.

It is our responsibility to understand the vital importance of birds in urban environments and to make sure they come back to populate these areas.

Road engineers, city planners and the authorities do not realise that without trees, birds are deprived of fruits, insects and nesting sites. Without trees, city birds are trapped. Since they have nowhere else to go, they end up nesting on unsightly concrete buildings or under roof eaves, which is extremely unsafe for them. In fact, it is very likely, for instance, that baby birds will die due to the intense heat of the sun because they do not have natural shade.

Furthermore, developers are obsessed with artificial landscaping



and choose exotic and imported plants that hardly provide shade.

A concrete example is the popularity lately gained by palm trees, which are unsuitable for migratory birds because they lack branches and are unable to provide shelter and food.

The growth of towns and cities at the expense of the countryside has contributed to the disappearance of several bird species, including the fantail, bulbul, Javan mynah, black-naped oriole (*pic*) and Asian koel, because their natural food sources have been destroyed.

While it is generally believed that birds fly long distances, this is not the case for Malaysian birds that are not strong fliers. They are usually seen hopping from branch to branch or from tree to tree foraging for food. It is therefore essential that urban planning takes into consideration the needs of both native and migratory birds, and that we create more conducive habitats for them.

Birds not only play an important role in the ecosystem but are also vital to many food webs. For instance, carnivorous birds naturally keep the population of rats and squirrels under control, thereby mitigating financial losses faced by farmers. Also, crop-friendly species such as bitterns and egrets feed on insects, pests, fish and crabs that thrive in fields.

These examples demonstrate that birds are great allies to farmers who usually rely on expensive – and often toxic and inhumane – pesticides to control animals considered as pests.

Besides the ecological benefits of a rich bird presence, their movement, colour, and sound enrich the quality of human life. In fact, it has been proven over and over again that coming into close contact with nature improves our physical and mental well-being.

Unfortunately, public perception of birds is poor, and they tend to be seen as nuisances and vectors of disease. If people were more aware of the vital role birds play in the environment as pollinators, seed dispersers, scavengers and predators of rodents and other small animals living in fields, negative misconceptions about them would cease to exist.

The process of bringing birds back to urban areas begins with creating habitats that are as close as possible to the natural ones, which would allow them to thrive under the most favourable conditions. This means adding plant diversity to cater to different bird species that rely on various plants and trees for food and shelter.

Unless more suitable trees are planted and tree-cutting is drastically reduced, birds in cities are doomed.

AN OBSERVER
Penang