KEMENTERIAN TENAGA DAN SUMBER ASLI

KERATAN SURAT KHABAR

SURAT KHABAR	:	NEW STRAITS TIMES			
TARIKH	:	27/1/2022 (KHAMIS)	MUKA SURAT	:	3
JABATAN	:	PERHILITAN			

COOPERATION AMONG AGENCIES

'ZERO POACHING LAST YEAR'

Stricter border control also led to fewer wildlife smuggling cases, says Perhilitan

KUALA LUMPUR

NO wildlife poaching cases were recorded during the Covid-19 pandemic last year due to movement restrictions and stricter border control.

The Department of Wildlife and National Parks (Perhilitan) said the number of wildlife smuggling cases also fell by 60 per cent in 2021, from 10 in 2020 to four last year.

The department recorded 10 poaching cases in 2020.

Perhilitan director of enforcement Noor Alif Wira Osman said the establishment of the National Task Force (NTF) contributed to the drop in cases.

"Wildlife smuggling cases fell by 60 per cent in 2021 since the government formed the NTF, which comprises 19 enforcement agencies. Their task is to manage illegal entry into the country," he told Bernama in an interview recently.

He said most wildlife smuggling took place in Johor.

"Cases are concentrated in Johor due to the number of possible wildlife trafficking routes there. They are where traffickers gather, transport and send animals and their derivatives to Indonesia."

The NTF was established in May 2020 to strengthen border control to curb illegal entry and the spread of Covid-19, as well as to crack down on poachers.

The Wildlife Conservation Society Malaysia said it believed the Khazanah Integrated Operation (OBK) also had a significant impact in reducing poaching and smuggling of wildlife.

Country director Dr Mark Rayan Darmaraj said OBK, formed in September 2019, was one of the best efforts by the government to get agencies working together to clamp down on wildlife trading and poaching.

The operation brought together the police, Customs Department and state forestry and wildlife authorities. Up to December, some 350 individuals have been arrested, wildlife worth about RM36.1 million has been seized and 1,425 animal traps have been destroyed.

Darmaraj said extensive monitoring of tigers in forested areas, especially in the priority tiger areas of Belum-Temengor, Taman Negara and Endau-Rompin, could help determine how effective OBK has been in preventing the further decline of the tiger population.

Preliminary results of the first National Tiger Survey conducted from 2016 to 2018 revealed that there are fewer than 200 tigers in 75 per cent of the surveyed plots.

The survey covered eight major tiger habitats in Kedah, Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan, Johor, Pahang, Kelantan and Terengganu.

"What we need now is a proper captive breeding programme for the sambar deer, which is the tiger's preferred prey. This deer species is declining due to overhunting and poaching in most of our forests and has been wiped out in a number of forest complexes," Darmaraj said.

He said this effort could improve tiger reproduction and cub survival rates, but stressed that other efforts were vital too, such as minimising poaching, maintenance of major forest blocks' connectivity, and managing the impact of climate change and diseases on the environment and wildlife.

To promote the recovery of the tiger population, Perhilitan releases about 100 sambar deer per year into different forest areas.

The Wildlife Conservation Society Malaysia is a non-profit organisation with the mission to save wildlife and wild places worldwide through science, conservation action, education and inspiring people to value nature.

Its operations are primarily based in the southern peninsula (Johor and Pahang) and Sarawak. It is currently working to conserve several priority species, namely tigers, elephants, orangutans, sharks and rays. **Bernama**