



KEMENTERIAN TENAGA DAN SUMBER ASLI

KERATAN SURAT KHABAR

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HUMAN-ELEPHANT CONFLICT

Preserve natural habitats of elephants

ELEPHANTS in Peninsular Malaysia are running out of space as evidenced by frequent reports of human-elephant conflict (HEC) in the media.

HEC is the result of habitat loss and habitat fragmentation, which are the main threats to elephants.

Hemmed in from all sides, elephants face many challenges: construction of dams and highways, intensive agricultural activities, conversion of lowland forests into oil palm and rubber plantations, logging activities, fragmented landscapes surrounded by crop fields, plantations, and new roads, the sprouting up of villages and cities.

These activities, alone or combined, destroy the natural migration path and

habitat of elephants. This competition brings both humans and animals into close contact with each other, with negative impacts for both.

Animals often use traditional migratory routes. Animals that are cut off from these routes stray into cultivated areas, destroying crops, attacking livestock, and, in extreme cases, killing humans, resulting in retaliatory actions by farmers in defence of their livelihood and safety.

Elephant habitats or range areas that are near to or adjoin human settlements have led to an increasing confrontation between man and beast. In most cases, elephants extend their range into human-dominated areas to feed on

cultivated foods and cash crops such as rubber saplings, oil palms, bananas.

HEC is a persistent occurrence in Malaysia, as well as in India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Indonesia, Vietnam and Cambodia.

HEC is a major concern among conservationists and state authorities. The biggest threat to elephants in Malaysia is the massive clearance of rainforests, which has led to extensive HEC conflict.

Such encounters often place elephants in a bad light, where they are viewed as a nuisance and unfavourably described as "rogues".

Shouting, using firecrackers and shooting guns into the air redirect elephants only temporarily.

The most effective deterrent is electric fencing, which is costly. However, elephants have been able to find their way into plantations even with electric fencing, as noted in the Air Banun resettlement in Gerik, Perak.

The Consumer Association of Penang remains pessimistic about the future of our elephants, whose population is said to be between 1,000 and 1,500 in Sabah, and an estimated 1,674 in Peninsular Malaysia.

There is an urgent need to protect the elephants and ease the HEC challenges. The best way to mitigate and manage HEC is by protecting their natural habitat. This could be done by way of preventing habitat fragmenta-

tion through wildlife linkages/corridors for species to migrate between habitats and forest patches through a less hostile environment.

For more effective mitigation techniques, there should be strong collaborations between experts and stakeholders, as well as the involvement of locals in land use planning and executing processes on a long-term basis.

Human-wildlife conflict will never end as long as humans and animals share and compete for the same resources.

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