



Harimau Untuk Selamanya

MYCAT Outreach Programme, Gerik, Perak
4th - 8th November 2008

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Poaching and illegal trade are major threats to tigers and their prey in Malaysia. Alongside the direct enforcement interventions carried out by the authorities, community outreach is a crucial tool to reduce consumption and trade of tigers and their prey.

Long-term outreach, especially, is preventive in nature, with the hope that death and smuggling of animals can be avoided by reducing the threats at the source. This is why Malaysian Conservation Alliance for Tigers (MYCAT) initiated the nationwide awareness campaign in 2007, encompassing both urban and rural community events.

One such campaign initiative was the week-long outreach programme conducted in November 2008 in Gerik, a major hotspot for poaching and trade, in Perak. Gerik's proximity to one of the priority conservation areas for wild tigers - Belum-Temengor Forest Complex - makes it a site for urgent attention.

In executing this programme, a team of a dozen volunteers conducted events from the 4th to the 8th of November in the town centre and in the nearby schools of Kg. Felda Bersia, Kg. Bersia and Kg. Basia Lama.



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The goal of the campaign is to reduce local trade and consumption of wildlife by using the tiger as a flagship species in addressing threats to other wildlife, including tiger prey species.

During the programme, the key messages highlighted the cruelty and illegality of using snares to trap wild animals and promoted the use of the **Tiger Crime Hotline 0193564194** as a tool for reporting wildlife crimes.

The timing of this programme was also crucial, as November is deer hunting season, a time for high poaching incidence, as armed hunters often opportunistically poach other animals too.

The approach taken at this site differed from previous programmes where the target audience is invited to the event at a specified location, as many members of this community are either directly involved in or closely connected to wildlife crimes. Instead, the programme was taken to them at the Pasar Tani (local produce market) and Pasar Malam (night market).



The team comprised staff and volunteers of TRAFFIC Southeast Asia, the Wildlife Conservation Society, WWF-Malaysia, the Malaysian Nature Society, as well as members of the Malaysian public.





Outreach in local markets

The stall proved highly popular, with the display of authentic tiger parts including a tiger pelt, sambar deer trophies, snares and traditional medicines derived from tiger parts. Audio clips to publicise the Tiger Crime Hotline and produced in collaboration with HOT FM, FLY FM and MY FM, grabbed the attention of the crowd, who stayed to learn more about wild animals in trouble and how they can help. The clips are currently airing on national radio as part of the MYCAT campaign.

Provocative posters of snared animals, dead or injured, were used to garner concern and encourage reporting of poaching and illegal wildlife trade. The emphasis was on making people understand that these inhumane crimes are happening in their backyards and possibly by people they know. The need for accurate and timely information sent to the hotline was stressed, as was the fact that, in return for good information, a reward could be given.

Volunteers mingled with the crowds, encouraging members of the public to push for improved national wildlife legislation and almost 800 petition signatures were collected. The petition, launched in December 2007, is a joint effort of MNS, TRAFFIC, WCS and WWF-Malaysia to call for the urgent review and amendment of the outdated Protection of Wild Life Act 1972. To date, more than 12,000 signatures have been collected towards the target of a 100,000 by June 2009.



Magnets and shopping bags, both emblazoned with the Tiger Crime Hotline number, were distributed to the local communities at the market during the event and after, shops in the town were asked to take the remaining for distribution to their customers.



At the Pasar Malam outreach, also held in Gerik, volunteers scoured the market in highly visible costumes to talk to shoppers and stall managers while collecting signatures and distributing the magnets. The team reached out to an estimated 2,000 people during these two programmes.



Outreach in local schools

Education programmes based on WCS' Teachers for Tigers were conducted at one secondary and two primary schools. The programmes, held at SMK Felda Bersia, SK RKT Bersia and SK Basia Lama targeted 600 students, aged between 10 and 16.



The students learned about tigers in culture, the importance of saving this top predator and the factors which threaten this species. To wrap up the programme in SK Basia Lama, a sketch was staged, with costumed animal characters expounding the need for better protection of wildlife in their habitat.

Wildlife stewardship

Cultivating and nurturing conservation-minded Malaysians is one of MYCAT's key objectives, and this extends not just to the audiences of the outreach programmes, but also to the volunteers who we engage and train to deliver these programmes.



Special care is taken to select motivated individuals, who are then trained by experts and mentored by staff from the MYCAT partners. This ensures that the programme achieves its goals and empowers the volunteers to take part in what is important to them. There were several familiar faces at the Gerik outreach, many who expressed interest in doing more and even pursuing a career in conservation. Such efforts by MYCAT to nurture these dedicated individuals is a testament to its commitment to change the level of wildlife stewardship among Malaysians.



Conclusion

MYCAT partner staff in the area who interviewed some locals two weeks after the programme reported that they were still talking about the outreach, and mentioned that the unusual approach taken at the Pasar Tani and Pasar Malam was of great interest. Some indicated the need for more programmes to be conducted. Such response is extremely encouraging, even if it is only suggestive of initial success. The long-term impact of this programme will be measured over time to give a clear result of its effectiveness.





Photos courtesy of Sara Sukor, Song Horng Neo-Liang, Loretta Ann Soosayraj and Suzalinur Manja Bidin, unless otherwise stated.

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Saving tigers together



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Take action!

- Learn about tigers and their prey from reliable sources and share with your friends and family.
- Join and support conservation organisations.
- Ask for legal herbal alternatives instead of traditional medicines claiming to contain tiger or other endangered species.
- Do not eat the meat of tiger, wild deer or wild pig.
- Stay away from all wildmeat restaurants.
- Pay more for wildlife-friendly products.
- Do not support zoos, theme parks or private collections which display illegally acquired wildlife.
- SMS reports of any suspected crimes involving tigers and their prey to the Tiger Crime Hotline at 019 356 4194.