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Letter to Editor

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Rehab is best left to hands of experts

Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) is shocked at the manner in which procedures to move a pair of gibbons led to a three day stand-off.

While there are local, regional, and federal laws that prohibit the public from having a wild animal in their possession, even while temporarily caring for it with the intention of release, wildlife rehabilitators or care centers are permitted to keep wildlife for rehabilitation.

Perhilitan should understand that rehabilitators have the necessary equipment, caging, and environment required by different species. They are trained to recognize and deal with injuries, illnesses, parasites and other conditions. They can administer appropriate medications, manage wounds, and stabilize an animal that is in shock. Not all veterinarians have experience with wild animals. A rehabilitator will know an appropriate veterinarian for consultation.

At the same time rehabilitators can care for an animal while preserving its wildness. An animal that has lost its normal or innate fear of humans will not survive in the wild. Releasing a tame wild animal is signing its death sentence. And this is why rehabilitation centre comes in handy.

In this case the rehabilitation centre is run by a professional and who happens to be a member of the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) Primate Specialist on Small Apes (SSA) and a member of the Captive Working Party. Besides she has already rescued gibbons before and now has 6 under her care which when first came were in deplorable condition. With her expertise and professional care they are responding well and when they are fully ready, they will be released into the wild in the future .

The question we put to Perhilitan is are their wildlife centres better off than private rehabilitation facilities? Is their facility at Sungkai better off than this private rehabilitation centre? Pictures forwarded to SAM from wildlife lovers depict their rescue sites in deplorable state. Gibbons here do not have a free run in their rescue site but instead are locked in cages.

It goes without saying that good husbandry and management are the key to successful treatment. To provide the best care and treatment for wildlife casualties, there need to be advances in techniques, practices and facilities. This does require that the facilities are operated in conjunction with high quality animal management systems based on a good understanding of the needs of wild animal species. This is particularly important in light of changes in legislation with the implementation of the Animal Welfare Act 2015.

In view of the deplorable state of Perhilitan's wildlife facilities, it is high time an audit be conducted into the rescue facilities operated by Perhilitan. A good solution is for Perhilitan to cooperate with established wildlife facilities run by professionals instead of going against them.

The field of wildlife rehabilitation is a discipline with its own body of literature, training and certification. In the best interests of wildlife, SAM urges Perhilitan to have the gibbons' well-being as their first priority by entrusting them into the capable hands of a trained, experienced, permitted rehabilitator.

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