



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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Letter to the Editor

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A Need to Find a Viable Solution to Living with Monkeys

The Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP) is concerned and extremely disappointed over the culling of macaques in Batu Caves, Gombak, Selangor in June 2023.

The shooting of 20 monkeys, some of those in cages were shot at point-blank range, by the Wildlife Protection and National Parks department (Perhilitan) raised the ire of the Sunway Mas apartment residents who lodged a police report against Perhilitan.

Perhilitan's reason for culling by shooting the macaques was due to complaints on damage to property. Although culling generally seems to be the most cost-effective means of reducing nuisance macaque populations, shooting does not always bring instantaneous death but prolonged suffering of an injured animal.

Culling is not a viable solution to the problem because wildlife experts concur that it is not the ultimate answer to problems with monkeys. Animals such as monkeys will quickly repopulate after culling. Moreover, other monkeys seeking space and territory will fill up the void left by the culled monkeys leading to conflict.

Normally culling is not just about going to the problem site to shoot. It is about removing the sick and the weakest, the old and the very young. Taking out the males and females from the group may change the dynamics of the troop. When the dynamics of the troop is changed the monkeys may move away from the place where they were culled, bringing the problem to another area.

Relocation is another possible option, however, relocated macaques may breed prolifically in the area thereby spilling the problem to neighbouring villages. It can also cause conflict between the relocated troop with the resident monkeys and also a possibility of spreading diseases to the new monkey population.

In the past contraception/sterilisation of macaques was a means of reducing monkey menace. These methods are labour intensive and involved trained staff besides being time consuming. Such programme must be continual until the macaque population stabilises and begins to decrease.

The humans-macaques conflict exists so long as human impinges on macaque habitat. Primates face the same range of threats encountered by many wildlife species ranging from agricultural expansion; fragmented habitat resulting in the loss of canopy connectivity; poor urban planning resulting in intrusion into wildlife habitats; and an ever-expanding human population.

Due to the loss of their original habitat and food sources, monkeys are attracted to human properties as sources of food and water. In general, food motivation is the main reason for human-wildlife conflicts caused by long-tailed macaques. So long as people and macaques share space and resources, there is bound to be interaction between the two.

Not doing anything is not a feasible course of action. A combination of approaches to reduce human-macaque conflict should include stringent enforcement of food and refuse management to prevent monkeys' access, and efforts for co-existence through strengthening and expansion of suitable protected habitats for wildlife.

Avoiding deforestation and planting new trees in forest areas are measures in reducing conflict rates in the long run. Ultimately, government authorities, policymakers, researchers, wildlife managers, local and indigenous communities must work together to develop, promote and implement effective strategies in the management of overabundant species instead of eliminating them.

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