



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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Letter to the Editor

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Save The Endangered Turtles

Researchers, environmentalists, and academicians have consistently warned of the impending loss of our invaluable turtle species. The Consumers Association of Penang (CAP) urges the authorities to heed the warnings and take serious efforts to address the problem.

The leatherback turtles once drew tourists by the thousands to Terengganu's Rantau Abang. Instead of admiring this living fossil in silence, it became a victim of abuse by the curious onlookers and visitors turned the nesting site into a place for beach parties.

According to a recent news report, Terengganu reported a steady decline in turtle landings in recent years. There have been no sightings of leatherback turtles in the state for the past five years. Data from the Malaysian Fisheries Department recorded the last two sightings in 2017.

There are seven species of sea turtles in the world, four of which frequent our shores. They are the leatherback turtles, hawksbill turtles, olive ridley and the green turtles. Unfortunately, their numbers are plummeting as they continue to nest, decreasing in abundance in Malaysia. They have been listed as endangered in the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red Data Book.

There are many risks and threats to turtles but the threat from humans is the one driving them to extinction. Among the natural predators faced by hatchlings are birds, monitor lizards and ants raiding the nests, and crabs but these natural threats do not cause the turtle population to plummet the way human interaction with the environment does.

Primarily, turtle egg consumption, illegal and unregulated trade, hunting turtles for food, medicine, and ornaments made from their beautiful carapaces are among the threats. Other contributory factors to turtles' population decline are sand mining, habitat loss due to coastal development near key nesting sites, entanglement in trawl nets, drift gillnets and other fishing gear.

Turtles die after ingesting plastic bags when they mistook the floating plastic bags for jellyfish. Marine pollution from oil spills, and chemicals also have serious impacts on both sea turtles and the food they eat. Higher temperatures from the effect of climate change can adversely affect sea turtle gender ratios that results in an imbalance in sexes thereby reducing reproductive opportunities and decreasing genetic diversity.

Turtles are important to and vital in regulating the in-shore ecosystems. By grazing on the algae they prevent the growth of algae on coral reefs. Any removal of species that graze on algae will result in huge algae growths which has detrimental impacts on coral reefs.

Ocean health is greatly enhanced by the presence of turtles. Preventive efforts to avoid their decimation must be initiated with firm action. Authorities need to address the insufficient protection of our marine wildlife. Without active intervention and management, marine turtle populations are expected to continue their decline to extinction. We urge state governments and regulatory authorities to work together, ensuring that laws and rules are enforced more effectively. We call for a ban on the sale of turtle eggs, reduce marine pollution, mitigate global warming, and maintain natural coastlines.

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President
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