



# Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

檳城消費人協會 பிளாங்கு பயனீட்டாளர் சங்கம்

Websites:  
(in English, BM, Chinese,  
& Tamil)  
[www.consumer.org.my](http://www.consumer.org.my)

10 Jalan Masjid Negeri, 11600 Pulau Pinang, Malaysia  
Tel: 604-8299511 Fax: 604-8298109  
email: [consumerofpenang@gmail.com](mailto:consumerofpenang@gmail.com)

Letter to the Editor

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## Roadkill Incidents in Malaysia: A Call to Action for Wildlife Protection

Roadkill incidents in Malaysia have become increasingly common, prompting the Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP) to urge the relevant authorities, including the Minister of Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability, the Wildlife Department (PERHILITAN), and the highway authorities, to tackle this issue.

The 2022 Auditor-General's Report reported a total of 2,562 incidents of wildlife being killed on the roads between the years 2016 and 2021, with Pahang having the highest number of such cases at 755. Other states mentioned include Johor, Negeri Sembilan, Perak, Terengganu, and Kedah. The animals killed include binturong (bearcat), elephant, bear, leopard, pangolins, mountain goat, tiger, and clouded leopard. Macaques are frequently among the victims, with 491 cases reported, followed by tapirs with 102 cases. Furthermore, there were various amphibians, reptiles, and birds that were also casualties of road accidents but were not officially documented.

The continuous rise in roadkill incidents is truly alarming. In March 2024 the media reported a tapir tragically losing its life in a motorcycle accident along Jalan Sungai Panjang, occurring within a day of a clouded leopard being struck by a vehicle on the West Coast Expressway. The roadkill death of a Malayan tiger in early July was the fourth involving the endangered species in nine months and as in 2022, there were fewer than 150 individuals left in the country.

It is crucial for Malaysians to realize that roadkill is not a normal occurrence that should be accepted. The normalization of seeing carcasses of animals on the road has desensitized people to the suffering and impact it has on our already endangered wildlife. Injured animals left unattended on the road may endure immense pain and suffering before succumbing to their injuries.

This issue must be addressed before more precious lives are lost unnecessarily. The construction of roads through wildlife habitats causes forest fragmentation, leading to habitat loss and changes in species abundance. This results in an increase in mortality rates due to vehicle collisions. Wildlife must move between habitats to find their necessities such as water, food source, new place to thrive and enhance genetic diversity. Managing the loss and fragmentation of wildlife habitats is a critical conservation challenge, particularly for large terrestrial megafauna with extensive ranges.

There is a significant lack of comprehensive and representative data regarding roadkills in places undergoing land use expansion for agricultural and energy purposes. The proliferation and expansion of road networks and transportation infrastructure has posed a significant challenge. Many research studies simply document the vertebrates that fall victim to road accidents without exploring the relationship between their numbers and various landscape variables.

The impact of roads on wildlife has not been adequately studied and often overlooked, which could endanger biodiversity, especially for small vertebrates. Despite the fact that vehicle collisions are a major threat to endangered mammals, little has been done to protect natural habitats disrupted by roads or prevent roadkill.

Despite the implementation of numerous wildlife crossings across various states to mitigate the impact of roads and highways on animal migration, incidents of roadkill persist. Wildlife crossing structures (tunnels, overpasses and underpasses) are a common approach; however their effectiveness remains unclear. Strategies to encourage wildlife to utilize these overpasses and underpasses need to be explored.

The Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP) urges the government to ensure safe passage on our roads for wildlife. through various measures such as the implementation of speed reduction zones in areas with high wildlife activity, the use of wildlife reflectors and conducting more road ecology studies to understand effective mitigation measures so as to be able to implement more environmentally friendly road development.

Placement of life-sized cutouts of wildlife placed along highways where motorists speed and at hotspots location has worked in Thailand. Another brilliant idea was a 3D optical illusion to prevent cars from hitting animals in Nakhon Ratchasima's Khao Yai.

Further measures include modifying the conduct of drivers, whose indifferent, uninformed, and antagonistic dispositions towards wildlife must be tackled. This objective can be accomplished by integrating awareness and educational programmes into driving lessons and by means of public outreach efforts. The significance of wildlife ought to be integrated into school syllabus to cultivate a sense of accountability from a young age.

In areas of high abundant biodiversity, it is essential to implement meticulous road planning and design. Constructing multiple wildlife crossings integrated with elements from tropical forests, such as vegetation, plants, and salt licks, can help attract wildlife. Additionally, the strategic use of fencing can effectively guide animals towards these crossings, reducing the risk of animals crossing roads at unpredictable locations.

Preserving ecological connectivity through corridors is crucial for the conservation of wildlife now more than ever. Protected and interconnected areas play a vital role in enhancing biodiversity and combating habitat fragmentation.

**Mohideen Abdul Kader**  
**President**  
**Consumers' Association of Penang**