

Report by Nur Hazwani Hassan and Salman Saaban

In early 2017, scientists warned of an emerging extinction crisis in South-east Asia driven in part by the rising use of snares to poach wildlife (Gray *et al.*, 2017). Commonly referred to as the landmines of the forest, snares are an illegal hunting method and their use punishable by law in Malaysia. Yet a snare—often a cheap length of cable or wire—is among the most common hunting tools used across the region, both in and outside protected areas. It is simple in form but devastating in impact, claiming the lives of hundreds of wild animals.

Malaysia has seen snare use grow over the years. From only 44 snares removed in 2013, the Department



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ANTI-SNARE CAMPAIGN: A YEAR OF COMBATING SNARES IN MALAYSIA

of Wildlife and National Parks Peninsular Malaysia (PERHILITAN) has recorded more than 200 snares deactivated from 79 hotspot areas in each subsequent year to a total of 2,890 snares until May 2018. Between 2015 and May 2018, PERHILITAN patrol teams encountered at least 52 animals, both dead or alive, caught in active snares in these hotspot areas, including Malayan Tiger *Panthera tigris jacksoni* (one), Asian Elephant *Elephas maximus* (two), Sun Bear *Helarctos malayanus* (11), Wild Boar *Sus scrofa* (11), Malayan Tapir *Tapirus indicus* (eight), Sumatran Serow *Capricornis sumatraensis* (two) and Barking Deer *Muntiacus muntjac* (seven). Recognising the heightened threat and need to bring wider attention to the issue, PERHILITAN called on conservation groups to join a campaign to tackle the incidence of snare trapping. The year 2018 has been declared the “Year of Combating Snares” in Peninsular Malaysia. In conjunction with commemoration of World Wildlife Day 2018, the campaign was launched by the Honorable Minister of Natural Resources and Environment (NRE) on 1 April 2018 at Ledang Square, Tangkak, State of Johor.

No single approach to combat the use of snares will work in isolation. The campaign was therefore designed to include a variety of approaches and partners that would address several issues: bring greater awareness of the impact of snares; allow the sharing of resources for patrolling and snare-removal operations; and, encourage the public to report the use of snares. The year-long campaign will work towards strengthening the level of protection of wildlife in protected areas and national parks in Peninsular Malaysia via a multi-agency enforcement taskforce consisting of enforcement agencies, and local NGOs, namely TRAFFIC, WWF-Malaysia, WCS (Wildlife Conservation Society) Malaysia Program, MNS (Malaysian Nature Society), MYCAT (Malaysian Conservation Alliance for Tigers), Rimba, and Pelindung. The majority of snare removal efforts have been and will continue to be carried out by PERHILITAN in collaboration with the Malaysian Armed Forces and the Royal Malaysian Police. These



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operations, supported by NGOs working within their respective study sites across Peninsular Malaysia, form an integrated, wide-reaching approach covering several protected areas and national parks. In addition, PERHILITAN is co-ordinating a rescue-rehabilitate-release programme for snared wildlife found alive during these actions. Alongside the forest-based operations, authorities will step up inspection at key locations in the country’s entry and exit points, deploying teams to set up roadblocks to detect smuggled wildlife in vehicles, and spot-checking business premises or workers’ camps.

In order to raise public awareness about the destructive impact of snares, the department and NGOs, including TRAFFIC, are jointly contributing to a public awareness programme that includes exhibitions, programmes for forest-fringe communities and schools, lectures on wildlife conservation, specially designed materials for social media messaging and a series of interviews with local newspapers. Two short videos on snares were also launched for streaming via mass media.

▲ Snare removal operation by PERHILITAN, at Merapoh, Pahang, at the border of Taman Negara National Park (top); a camera trap image of a snared Sun Bear *Helarctos malayanus* in Endau-Rompin National Park, Johor.

These one-minute public service announcement videos were created by local production house, Nuvista Media, to reach a much broader audience on poaching issues, encouraging those watching to report wildlife crime and reminding consumers of the high penalties wildlife offenders may face under the *Wildlife Conservation Act 2010*, Peninsular Malaysia's primary wildlife legislation.

While penalties are high for snare use—a maximum fine of RM100,000 (USD24,792) and up to two years' imprisonment—images of trapped and injured wildlife make the headlines fairly frequently. Many include specimens of severely threatened species: a Clouded Leopard *Neofelis nebulosa* bearing snare wounds was found dead not far from a snare in early 2018; a Malayan Tiger was discovered with a wounded front leg caught in a snare in 2016; and there were several cases of snared Sun Bears in 2014 (Aris, 2016; Krishnasamy and Or, 2014; Maharan, 2018; Sharma, 2017). All were found in the country's northern State of Perak, home to wildlife-rich forests such as the Belum-Temengor Forest Complex (BTFC). A sprawling landscape of jungles and waterways, the BTFC boasts a Royal State Park and forest reserves, yet hasn't been spared the scourge of poaching with snares.

Between 2008 and 2010, at least 142 snares were also discovered and de-activated by a WWF-Malaysia wildlife monitoring unit working with authorities in the BTFC (WWF, 2014). In the same period, TRAFFIC recorded the loss of over 400 animals, one of which involved a well-publicised case of a tiger found alive after several days in a snare, which later died from its injuries (TRAFFIC, 2009). Detection of snares in this area has continued, with 27 removed over 18 months beginning August 2011, and 60 more between January 2016 and March 2017 alone (Krishnasamy and Or, 2014; Sharma, 2017).

Snares plague other protected areas too: between 2010 and 2013, 2,241 snares and 1,728 illegal campsites were destroyed by NGOs working in three priority tiger landscapes (MYCAT, 2014). These incidents highlight the illegal use of snares and how active poaching activities involving their use may be having a detrimental impact on Malaysia's wildlife.

A period of 12 months may be insufficient to make significant impacts on poaching, but the campaign has placed this pervasive but little-discussed threat in the spotlight. This provides an opportunity for those working on wildlife protection to solicit solid information on the use of snares and establish just how extensive is their use. Such data will be valuable for informed decision-making in any future wildlife policy that seeks to eliminate the use of snares from Malaysia's forests.

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PERHILITAN official during an anti-snare operation, Gunung Inas Forest Reserve, Kedah.

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