

Experts sound the alarm

Deforestation forcing wildlife into urban areas

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GEORGE TOWN: Wild animals are venturing out from their natural habitat due to changes in the ecosystem and the ecological balance in nature caused by deforestation, says wildlife expert Dr Nadine Ruppert.

The Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) zoologist, primatologist and conservation biologist said these animals would come into cleared areas to find food after losing their natural habitat in the forest.

"We have read media reports of tapirs or elephants being hit by cars while crossing roads, and tigers wandering into villages.

"These incidents are alarming signs of wildlife losing their habitat due to human infrastructure development.

"The public should always review upcoming development in their neighbourhoods, and advocate for a sustainable development that does not harm nature.

"The loss of forests is not only detrimental to wildlife but also to humans, who will lose their source of clean air and water.

"It also poses a higher risk of landslides and flooding.

"There are many fascinating



To the rescue: Civil Defence Force personnel showing an owl they caught during one of their operations in George Town, Penang.

creatures residing in human backyards which are vital for the ecosystem as they help in pollination and seed dispersal.

But with human development, these animals are struggling to cope with the situation," she said.

Ruppert said some animals are simply more adaptable and naturally less shy to come into human settlements.

"This can be seen with macaques, for example, who are often found in disturbed areas where they forage for food in dumpsters or where people actively feed them.

"Other primate species like gibbons, however, are highly

dependent on certain food plants in the forest.

"They are not comfortable to come down to the ground. Many gibbons will remain in the small remaining forest fragments and may eventually perish," she said.

Ruppert said not feeding wild animals, like monkeys, in urban areas was one of the best ways to care for them.

"Feeding wildlife is considered a long-term harm and short-term benefit to the animals," she said.

She added that the public should be informed about Malaysia's highly diverse and unique wildlife species of which many are threatened

with extinction.

"For example, if you have never heard about colugos (kubong), slow lorises (kongkang) or flying foxes (keluang) please look them up online.

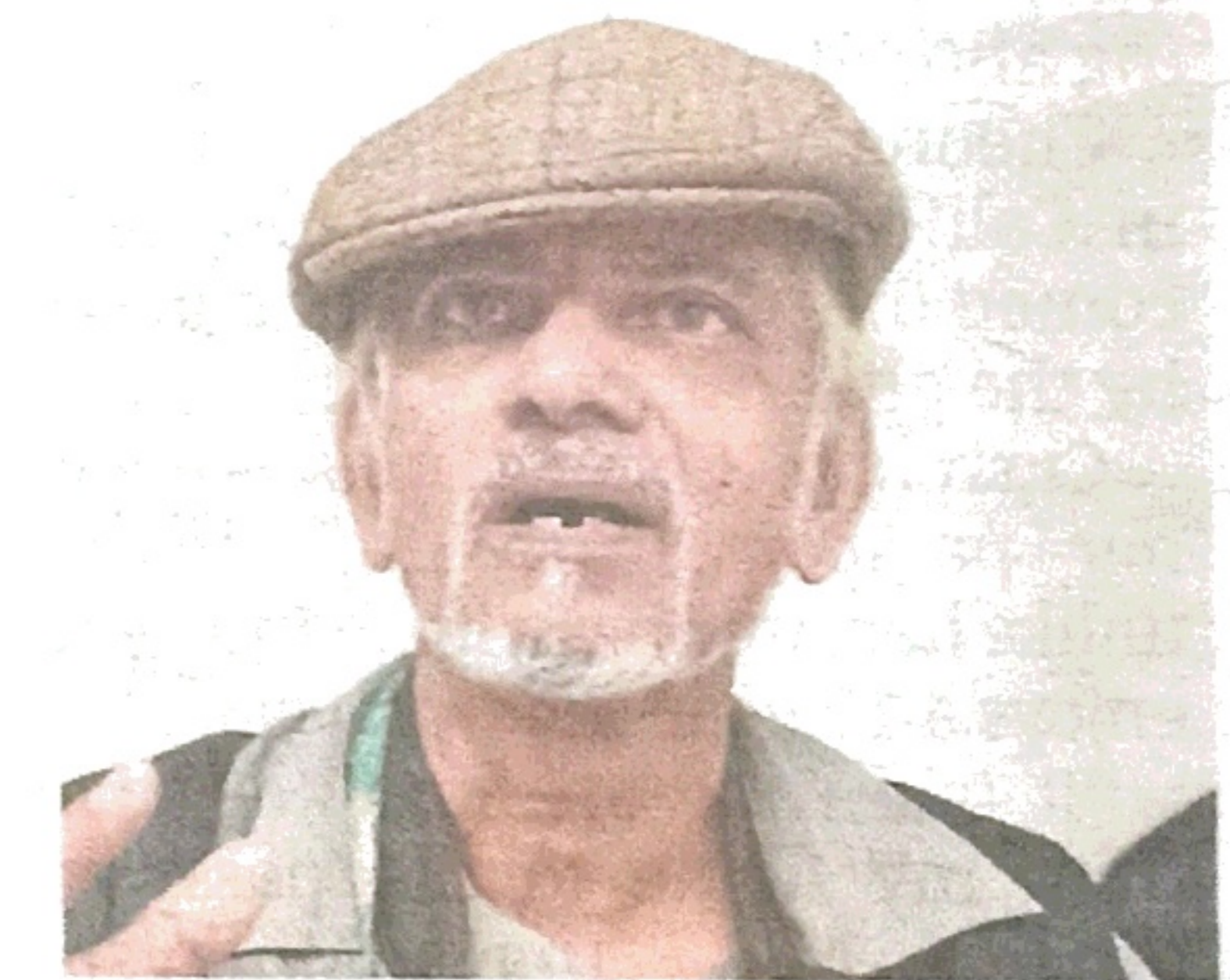
"In the days of social media, it is very easy to get in touch with organisations that work for the protection of wildlife.

"These organisations offer fantastic education materials or opportunities to participate in their projects," she said.

Ruppert said if time or money is scarce, learning about wildlife protection and simply talking about it with friends and family would be a way to spread aware-



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ness and advocate for the protection of threatened species.

Malaysia Nature Society (MNS) Penang branch adviser D. Kanda Kumar said the only way to prevent a "clash" between humans and wildlife was to immediately stop all development in green areas.

"These green areas must be protected and not be encroached on anymore. Otherwise, there won't be enough places for wild animals to live," he said.

Kanda Kumar said animals were venturing out because their habitats had been taken over by developments.

He said the authorities should let green areas in Penang grow so that wild animals can migrate to these places.