



**UNIT KOMUNIKASI KORPORAT JABATAN
PERIKANAN MALAYSIA
BERITA PERIKANAN HARI INI**

**26 Oktober 2024
23 Rabiulakhir 1446H**

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SUKRI Deris (kiri) bersama Dr. Kavvin Sehgar (tiga dari kiri) mengangkat penyu agar 'Emelda' untuk dilepaskan di perairan Pulau Pasir, Langkawi, Kedah.

'Emelda' sudah pulih, dilepas semula di perairan Langkawi

LANGKAWI: Seekor penyu agar betina yang diselamatkan pertubuhan bukan kerajaan (NGO) Marecet, dilepaskan ke habitat asalnya di sini, semalam.

Pengarah Perikanan negeri, Sukri Deris berkata, penyu yang diberi nama Emelda itu diselamatkan pada 18 Julai lalu dan dirawat di Underwater World Langkawi (UWL).

"Penyu itu hanya seberat 38 kilogram (kg) semasa diselamatkan dan kini beratnya mencecah 55kg selain pulih sepenuhnya

daripada kecederaan yang dialaminya," katanya selepas Program Konservasi Marin dan Konsultasi Bersama Kumpulan Sasar Daerah Langkawi di Jeti Kubang Dadak, Kampung Ewa, di sini.

Menurutnya, Emelda dilepaskan di perairan Pulau Pasir, di sini kerana kawasan tersebut adalah laluan penghijrahan penyu dan lokasi mencari makanan.

Sementara itu, veterinar UWL, Dr. Kavvin Sehgar berka-

ta, penyu tersebut mengalami kecederaan pada paru-parunya, dipercayai berlanggar dengan objek tumpul seperti bot atau jetski.

"Kecederaan tersebut menyebabkan penyu ini tidak dapat menyelam dan mencari makanan dengan baik.

"Penyu ini juga tidak dilepaskan bersama penjejak tetapi kami sedia bekerjasama dengan Pejabat Perikanan bagi melakukan lebih banyak penyelamatan di masa hadapan," ujarnya.

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'Ikan Bandaraya' – from aquarium to aggression

By ALLISON LAI and HO JIA WEN
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PETALING JAYA: The popular ikan bandaraya, or suckermouth catfish, is sought after among hobbyists for its ability to clean fish ponds and aquariums of algae and sediment.

However, they are also often dumped into drains or rivers when they grow too big for aquariums.

That leads to the problem of these invasive fish destabilising riverbanks and causing erosion due to their aggressive burrowing behaviour, says an expert researcher.

"As these fish dig extensive networks of tunnels and cavities, they significantly disrupt sedi-

ment stability, particularly in riparian zones," Universiti Sains Malaysia Engineering Campus' River Engineering and Urban Drainage Research Centre (REDAC) deputy director Dr Chang Chun Kiat said yesterday.

"The burrowing not only loosens riverbank soil, heightening erosion risk, altering riverbeds, disrupting natural flow and reducing biodiversity by outcompeting native species for resources.

"It threatens critical infrastructure near rivers by destabilising banks and compromising the integrity of bridges, embankments and flood controls," he said.

Chang recommended several strategies to mitigate erosion and sedimentation from suckermouth catfish, including reinforcing riv-

erbanks with armour rock or materials to prevent burrowing.

"Boost native herbivorous species through stocking programmes to restore ecosystems and outcompete invasive fish. Conduct organised removal initiatives, like Selangor's ikan bandaraya hunting campaign, to control fish populations.

"We can also install control structures to isolate infested areas and prevent the spread of invasive fish," he said.

Chang also called on the Fisheries Department to collaborate with NGOs like Ikan Bandaraya Hunters and River Monster Hunters, and organise social media campaigns to highlight the need for collective action.

"Encouraging local fish for

ornamental, recreational and aquaculture purposes can reduce dependency on alien species, benefiting both our ecosystems and our communities," he added.

Environmental pollution engineer Loi Hang Kuang said rock bunds and concrete walls are solutions to stop bank erosion.

"While rock bund is a cheaper option, the concrete wall has a better resistance to erosion," he said.

Loi also said mangrove trees are important to keep erosion at bay as well as creating a safe habitat for many wildlife species.

Preservation and replanting of the vegetation along riverbanks is also one of the best and most natural ways to protect the riverbanks, he added.

Suckermouth catfish has nine lives, says USM biologist after experiment

By LO TERN CHERN
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GEORGE TOWN: It was frozen in a refrigerator for a week. But when the biologist took it out of the ice and thawed it out, it came back to life and started thrashing.

The suckermouth catfish (ikan bandaraya) is one species that refuses to die.

Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) biologist Dr Khaironizam Md Zain found that out after he ran an experiment.

"It was frozen solid for a week. Yet it lived again. The fish can also survive in low oxygen and brackish water environments, or being out of the water for a much longer time than other fish. It has a specialised respiratory system of labyrinthine organs that extracts oxygen from the air.

"To avoid desiccation, they may bury themselves in mud or hide in moist places," said the School of Biological Sciences senior lecturer.

In Penang, he said they could cause soil erosion along riverbanks because of how they breed.

"The burrowing behaviour causes soil erosion along riverbanks. They dig deep into riverbanks to create breeding sites, and buildings beside rivers can be threatened when the ground is hollowed out," he said.

Because Penang has a dense urban population, Khaironizam said soil displacement caused by the burrowing of tens of thousands of suckermouth catfish can lead to severe riverbank instability.

"In Penang, we found a high population of the fish in two rivers on the island – the highly-polluted Sungai Pinang in Jelutong near the City Stadium, and (the similarly named) Sungai Pinang in Balik Pulau.

"On the mainland, they are found in many rivers including canals near padi fields and retention ponds," he said.

He said eradicating suckermouth catfish would require a collective effort.

"Due to their spiny scales and slimy mucus, which make them unpalatable and difficult to swallow, even predators such as monitor lizards avoid eating them.

"Control measures for these invasive catfish include capture and removal, such as organised fishing events and electrofishing.

"We need to raise awareness among aquarium owners to prevent further releases, with campaigns in pet stores and online resources to educate fish owners on the ecological risks associated with releasing these species into our waters."

Khaironizam also cautioned the public against eating suckermouth catfish, as the fish may contain hazardous substances such as heavy metals due to their habitats often being contaminated and characterised by poor water quality.

Attack of the monster fish

Suckermouth catfish threatens riverbanks, cities

By ARFA YUNUS
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PETALING JAYA: Our freshwater fish are being driven to extinction, while riverbanks are facing massive erosion which could pose risks to urban infrastructure, especially in major cities like Kuala Lumpur.

The culprits in both cases is an invasive species of fish. Or three species, to be precise.

These fish burrow into the sand at riverbanks, destabilising them and causing erosion. When the river gets swollen during heavy rain, it could lead to the collapse of the banks.

In Kuala Lumpur, these fish are found in large numbers in the Klang River, Sungai Gombak and Sungai Batu, on whose banks stand many major buildings. They are also found in Sungai Kuyoh, Sungai Keroh and Sungai Jinjang.

In fact, more than 80% of rivers in Klang Valley been "plundered and permanently inhabited" by non-native fish, says Fisheries Department (DOF) director-general Datuk Adnan Hussain, who added that native aquatic life there is expected to become extinct soon.

The three species of suckermouth catfish, all commonly referred to as "ikan bandaraya", are wreaking havoc on our rivers, and the consequences could be more devastating than initially thought, experts warn.

The species in question are the *Hypostomus plecostomus* (common pleco), *Pterygoplichthys pardalis* (Amazon sailfin catfish) and *Pterygoplichthys disjunctivus* (Vermiculated sailfin catfish).

"They dig holes in riverbanks to lay their eggs and shelter their young, weakening the soil. That leads to erosion and the collapse of the riverbanks," says Prof Dr Mohammad Noor Amal Azmai, a professor at the Institute of Bioscience at Universiti Putra Malaysia.

He estimates that the suckermouth catfish population in Malaysia may have reached

100,000 across the peninsula.

"Can you imagine how many holes they have dug up? Easily tens of thousands if not hundreds of thousands," he said. "Imagine what will happen when we have floods. It will be much worse."

He added that the fish are also breeding uncontrolled because they have no natural predators.

Originally from the Amazon River basin in South America, these three species have made their way into Malaysian rivers, causing significant disruption to local ecosystems.

"This is particularly problematic for densely populated cities like Kuala Lumpur.

In June, it was reported that over 700kg of ikan bandaraya was caught at Denai Sungai Kebangsaan, near UKM, during a programme involving 116 members of the Komuniti Peiluburu Ikan Bandaraya. And that was just in one place.

"We need more efforts like this across Malaysia," said Prof Noor Amal.

Biodiversity expert Dr Amirrudin Ahmad, a professor at Universiti Malaysia Terengganu's Faculty of Science and Marine Environment shared his concerns, saying the fish accelerate soil erosion by disturbing riverbeds.

"Over time, the holes they make destabilise riverbanks," he said.

He added that in big cities, even minor changes in the stability of riverbanks can have significant consequences.

"It's not an immediate crisis, but over time, these disturbances can add up, potentially affecting buildings and homes near riverbanks," Prof Amirrudin said.

He believes a comprehensive study is urgently needed to assess the full impact of the suckermouth catfish on the environment, particularly in urban areas.

"We need to understand the scale of the damage they're causing to determine the best course of action."

Prof Amirrudin suggests a collaborative approach between the DOF, Irrigation and Drainage Department, as well as engineers



to tackle the issue.

"Universities and government bodies already have the equipment and technology, including cost-effective methods like electrofishing, to manage the population of suckermouth catfish."

Electrofishing, a technique that uses electric shocks to temporarily stun fish, is one such method that could help remove the invasive species from rivers in an efficient manner without harming other species.

The growing population of these fish, which can reach up to 600 grams each, also poses a threat to Malaysia's biodiversity, particularly in the Gombak basin, he said.

"If left unchecked, these fish could disrupt the natural balance in our freshwater ecosystems.

The DOF has previously

expressed concerns about the ecological risks posed by the suckermouth catfish as they can be found infesting several Malaysian rivers.

A previous DOF report in 2019 found that the fish's burrowing behaviour is leading to muddy waters and the collapse of riverbanks, which destabilises the aquatic environment.

The DOF has also consistently urged the public not to release non-native species into rivers, warning that such practices can have long-lasting consequences for local biodiversity.

"It's not too late to address this issue, but we need to act now," said Prof Amirrudin.

"With the right resources and collaboration, we can mitigate the damage and safeguard both our urban infrastructure and our natural ecosystems," he said.