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## WILDLIFE

# A danger to keep them as pets

SAHABAT Alam Malaysia (SAM) compliments the Selangor Department of Wildlife and National Parks (Perhilitan) for the recent seizure of wildlife at a condominium in Desa Pandan. However, the fine of RM3,000 or a jail sentence of two years or both is dismal compared with the gravity of the crime.

SAM agrees with Perhilitan's deputy director that the case is only the tip of the iceberg. It seems to be a trend to keep wildlife as pets.

One can easily source for wildlife by logging on to the Internet, scanning the classified sections of trading and specialist magazines or visiting pet shops. Pet shops may not openly sell endangered species but they can source them from dealers or get contacts for the customers.

Many species targeted as pets are endangered and the desire to own them is pushing these exotic animals to extinction. Every animal, whether or not it is an endangered spe-

cies, will suffer as a result of this unethical trade.

Many owners fail to inform the authorities of the "dangerous" animal in their possession due to ignorance or unwillingness to apply for a licence and the costs incurred.

Thus, the actual number of wildlife kept as pets is unknown.

Of concern to conservationists is how the pet trade is contributing to the dwindling of wildlife worldwide and the impact of this loss of diversity on the environment.

Furthermore, it is not just the threat to wildlife that makes this trade so disturbing but also its effects on the animals held in captivity.

The lack of regulation in the pet trade of wild species means that there is no guarantee of quality of care for these animals.

Wild animals are not suitable to be kept as companions at home because of their wild nature and behaviour, dietary needs, and special care com-

pared with domesticated animals.

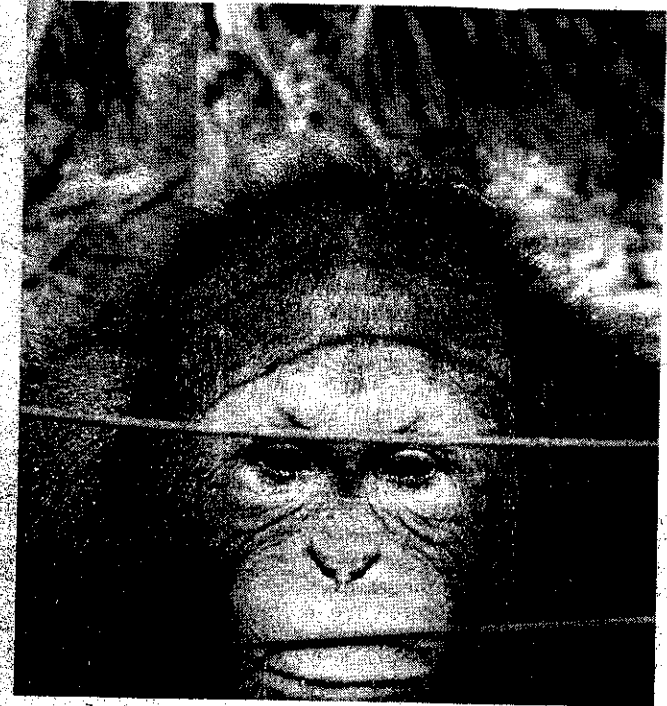
The scale and nature of the trade in "pet ownership" of endangered wildlife should be investigated.

There are also concerns about the welfare of wildlife kept at resorts, for example, the penguin that was kept in the swimming pool of an executive suite in Kuala Lumpur as an added attraction. For such animals, little protection is guaranteed by the legislation governing the ownership of these animals.

Resort owners are capitalising on such wildlife by using them to entertain guests. Such shows are meaningless and an embarrassment to the country.

Moreover, the keeping of wildlife by resorts is to create a false impression that they are also into conservation efforts. Such facilities have no lofty goal of protecting bio-diversity; it is simply a business that trades in cruelty.

The legislation appears to be incoherent and inadequate,



There have been a number of cases of orang utans being kept as pets.

resulting in loopholes that contribute to abuse, inconsistency in enforcement and, ultimately, serious implications to the welfare and conservation of endangered wildlife species.

Prohibiting the possession of endangered wildlife will boost enforcement efforts to combat the illegal trade in the range states and in countries that serve as transit routes for highly sought-after wildlife. This will, in turn, lift the pressure on wildlife populations

and eliminate the welfare concerns associated with the trade.

Proper enforcement of animal welfare and conservation regulations should be given priority in the proposed amendment to the Wildlife Protection Act.

Good legislation is vital but it is meaningless without effective enforcement.

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