

Crocodiles play important role in ecosystem'

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**KUCHING:** Crocodiles in their habitat should not be seen as a threat but more for their important role in the river ecosystem to ensure that rivers are functioning and well-balanced. Sarawak Forestry chief executive officer Ali Yusop, who pointed this out, said crocodiles, had played a vital role in a river's ecosystem and their presence is important to the environment.



*LEARNING ABOUT CROCODILES: Dr Hazland (centre) presenting prizes to winners of an essay competition held in conjunction with the programme as Ali (second left) and Bujang (left) look on.*

“Crocodiles are known as the species that cleans up the river as they eat carcasses of other species and balance its population in the habitat. These had been seen as a major role to ensure rivers are functioning smoothly,” said Ali.

He was speaking at the 3M Buaya programme at the Dewan Kampung Hijrah, Bako yesterday.

Ali elaborated that while it was known that the population of crocodiles was increasing, especially in the rivers along Bako, residents were urged to understand the important aspects of the species to ensure that both can live without harming each other.

“Knowledge on crocodiles by villagers can be turned into an opportunity for them to be involved in ecotourism industry. This is why programmes such as today are vital to disseminate information and knowledge of crocodiles and its habitat,” he added.

Pointing to Sarawak Forestry's continuous effort towards crocodiles' conservation, he added that his department will also continue to monitor population of the species.

“We also had come up with a research together with Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) whereby the outcome of the research can be the basis of scientific solution for any decisions to be taken in the future with regards to the species,” he said.

Meanwhile, Demak Laut assemblymen Dr Hazland Abang Hipni said crocodiles' habitat along the rivers in Bako is a tourism opportunity that the villagers can take advantage of.

“Crocodiles sight-seeing is one interesting option which can lure tourist to Bako, apart from bird watching and visiting the Bako National Park. This effort can be worked on, but villagers must first understand the species and can get along without harming them and their habitat,” Dr Hazland said.

He added that the population of the species was known to increase, and according to a research conducted along the rivers of Bako, at least five crocodiles were sighted within one kilometre radius and there might be hundreds of them along the river.

“The villagers must not look at them as a threat or killer reptile. Last year, there were only five attacks and three casualties reported in the state, and the number is considered low.

“Safety aspects however should not be neglected and villagers can improve the level of safety to their boats by installing grilles or safety partition,” he said and added that culling is not always the solution to stop crocodile attacks on human.

The 3M (Mengenal,Memahami,Memelihara) Buaya, which stands for ‘to Know, Understand, Conserve’ programme yesterday saw over 300 participants, including students participating in the programme.

Also present yesterday was political secretary to the Chief Minister Bujang Helmi.

*extracted from theborneopost.*