

# CASES OF REPTILES CAUGHT AT HOME ON THE RISE NATIONWIDE

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*PETALING JAYA: Uninvited guests can be an exciting surprise but the last thing anyone wants to find outside the door is a snake.*

No thanks to the El Nino phenomenon, there has been an alarming number of cases of snakes caught inside homes, buildings and close to human habitat in the past two months.

The Malaysian Civil Defence Department (JPAM) has recorded a total of 3,780 cases in March and 3,708 cases in February nationwide, while the Fire and Rescue Department has recorded 973 cases in March and 899 cases in February nationwide.

According to JPAM Disaster Management and Operations Lt Kol Mohd Azhar Mujab, the increase in numbers of cases actually spiked beginning December 2015 due to the change from the rainy season to hotter climates and made worse by El Nino.

“Snakes migrate to new places if their old habitats are destroyed or no longer suitable for them,” he said.

“It is likely that these snakes are looking for more suitable places due to the hot weather because they prefer to rest between the leaves and rocks as well as tree roots.”

Should people find snakes in their houses, his advice for them was to stay calm and refrain from provoking the snakes.

“Try identifying if the snake is venomous. If you are unsure, just assume that it is dangerous,” he said, adding that people should immediately call civil defence members or firemen.

Statistics from both departments also showed that Selangor’s count was by far the highest, with an alarming 830 cases combined last month alone.

Selangor Fire and Rescue Department assistant director of operations Mohamad Sani Harul said that the combined factor of hot season and increase in open fires was what had sent many venomous animals such as snakes in a migratory period to look for cooler habitats.

“They will look for cooler places they feel safe in such as underneath cupboards and chairs, as well as the kitchen and washroom,” he said.

He warned people to be careful not to provoke the snakes as during such period, snakes are especially sensitive and aggressive.

“Venomous snakes such as the cobra, king cobra, Malayan trait and vipers can kill in an instant so we need to be alert with our surroundings,” he said.

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) herpetologist Prof Dr Indraneil Das advised the public to keep the periphery of their homes clean to discourage reptiles from entering.

“In the event of a snake-bite, it is important to document the case carefully, especially a description of the snake, in order to determine whether it is venomous or not.

“A photograph, even one taken with a mobile phone is of great help,” said Dr Indraneil.

He said images and case history sent by the attending physician to the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Medical Centre will help a team of specialists to identify the species and suggest appropriate anti-venom serum and specific medical assistance.

UKM’s Institute for Environment and Development (Lestari) associate fellow Zainey Zainudin said the habitats of reptiles, particularly snakes and monitor lizards were fast being displaced by development thus creating a need to find alternative shelters in people’s homes and other premises during hot days to keep cool.

“In such cases, since it is unavoidable with humans encroaching into their habitats, learn how to live with nature and learn how to react to wildlife.