



Not so wild about wildlife neighbours

Most S'poreans prefer to relocate animals spotted near their homes than to leave them alone: Survey

Vanessa Liu

As Singapore blossoms into a city in a garden, wildlife encounters will no longer be as rare as hen's teeth.

But Singaporeans seem to have some way to go before they embrace all such meetings wholeheartedly, particularly when it comes to creatures that can sting, bite or create mischief.

While free-roaming otters, wild chickens and hornbills are Instagram darlings in Singapore, this is not the case for other animals such as monkeys, snakes or wasps, a new study has found.

Killing wildlife such as pythons or monkeys is generally not the first option, according to a joint survey by Nanyang Technological University and Tokyo Metropolitan University, but people would rather have the animals moved away from their living space than be left alone.

"If people had a choice, they would choose not to kill the animal. There is still some kind of empathy with animals even though (some respondents) don't want these animals to coexist with them," said Dr Ngo Kang Min, lead author of the study.

The team polled around 1,000 people to find out how welcoming Singaporeans would be towards animal neighbours. They were asked for their reactions towards three creatures – a macaque, a hornet and a python – each in three scenarios causing varying levels of harm.

The respondents then rated how acceptable it was to do nothing, to monitor the situation, to inform others in the vicinity about the presence of the animal, to move the animal elsewhere, or trap and kill it.

More than 50 per cent felt it would be most appropriate to move the animal somewhere else.

Simply moving animals away is not the solution, though, said Dr Ngo, who is from NTU's Asian School of the Environment. "If you consider that these green areas are closer to our homes in future, it will cause more and more conflicts going forward. There wouldn't be enough space for us to translocate

all these animals."

Earlier this year, the Urban Redevelopment Authority announced plans to add 1,000ha more of parks and park connectors across the island. The 13 per cent increase of green spaces over the existing 7,800ha is expected to put nine in 10 Singaporeans within a 10-minute walk from a park in 15 years' time.

As encounters become more common, people will also get more accustomed to animals in their midst, say experts.

The survey bears this out: The findings suggest the higher the level of exposure to nature and wildlife in childhood, the more tolerant participants are of problem-causing animals.

Mr Louis Ng, an MP for Nee Soon GRC and founder of wildlife rescue group Animal Concerns Research and Education Society (Acres), said the results do not necessarily indicate an aversion to the animals.

"Some of the respondents might feel that the animals don't belong (outside of their natural habitats) and that it would be kinder to put them back in the forest. But these people don't understand that some animals, such as the macaques, are peripheral species and thus live at the edge of the forests."

Mr Ng also said the general public cares for animals and cited a recent survey among residents of Sin Ming Court regarding free-ranging chickens in their neighbourhood. Over 90 per cent had voted for the authorities to leave the fowl alone instead of moving them elsewhere.

The National Parks Board has pointed out that many wild animals would much rather not encounter humans, and would attack only when provoked. "Living in close proximity with nature means we need to know how we can coexist harmoniously with wildlife so that we can continue to enjoy the bene-



>50%

Percentage of respondents in a survey who felt it would be most appropriate if animals living near them were moved to another location. The survey polled about 1,000 people to find out how welcoming Singaporeans would be towards animal neighbours.

fits of living in a well-balanced ecosystem," it said on its website.

Ms Anbarasi Boopal, deputy chief executive of Acres, said awareness has risen over the last decade, although there was more to be done on teaching people the dos and don'ts when encountering wild animals.

"We hope that with increasing awareness, the willingness to coexist will also improve," she said, pointing out that if people wanted to see the animals they like around them, they would have to expect others as well. "It is not possible to have greenery and certain preferred aspects such as birds and butterflies only. Insects will attract geckos and bats, which can in turn attract garden snakes," she added.

A macaque stealing a box at MacRitchie Reservoir. When it comes to creatures that can sting, bite or create mischief, people prefer that they are moved away from their living space rather than be left alone, a joint survey by two universities showed.

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