



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

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Penyu pertama mendarat selepas 30 tahun

Lokasi penyu itu pernah mendarat tidak boleh dikesan kerana tiada nombor tag pengenalan diri ditemui

Oleh NORHASPIDA YATIM

KUALA TERENGGANU

Kemunculan penyu daripada spesies agar yang mendarat untuk bertelur di Pantai Batu Buruk pada Isnin lalu adalah yang pertama direkodkan Jabatan Perikanan Negeri Terengganu selepas 30 tahun lalu.

Pengarah Jabatan Perikanan Terengganu, Ruzaidi Mamat berkata, sebelum ini belum ada lagi penyu direkodkan muncul di pantai berkenaan dan dipercayai menjadi lokasi pertama pendaratan reptilia laut tersebut.

Katanya, hasil pemeriksaan pada badan penyu berkenaan tiada sebarang nombor tag yang biasanya dipasang untuk pengenalan diri setiap penyu.

“Jika penyu ini memiliki nombor tag, kita boleh kesan lokasi ia pernah mendarat sebelum ini.

“Jadi kita percaya penyu ini mungkin tidak pernah lagi mendarat di mana-mana pantai di Terengganu sebelum ini dan Pantai Batu Buruk adalah lokasi pertama penyu berkenaan singgah untuk bertelur,” katanya kepada pemberita pada Rabu.

Menurut Ruzaidi, terdapat empat spesies penyu yang pernah muncul di kawasan pantai di Terengganu iaitu penyu karah, penyu agar, penyu belimbing dan penyu lipas.

Bagaimanapun katanya, buat masa ini hanya penyu daripada spesies karah dan agar dilihat masih muncul dan mendarat untuk bertelur di pesisir pantai di negeri ini.



Sebanyak 49 biji telur penyu dibawa ke Pusat Konservasi Dan Penerangan Penyu (TCHC) Rantau Abang, Dungun untuk proses pengoraman.

“Penyu karah biasanya akan mendarat di kawasan pulau setiap tahun untuk bertelur namun spesies penyu lipas dan belimbing sudah lama tidak muncul. Kali terakhir penyu lipas mendarat di Terengganu ialah pada 2004 iaitu di Kemasik, Kemaman dengan menghasilkan 330 biji telur daripada tiga sarang.

“Penyu belimbing pula kali terakhir mendarat di Terengganu pada 2017 di Pantai Rantau Abang dengan menghasilkan 124 biji telur daripada dua sarang,” katanya.

Sehubungan itu, Ruzaidi menyeru orang ramai supaya bersama-sama menjaga hidupan berkenaan bagi memastikan ia

terus terpelihara untuk tatapan generasi akan datang.

Katanya, sebarang maklumat berkaitan penemuan penyu perlu disalurkan kepada Jabatan Perikanan Negeri.

Dalam pada itu, beliau turut mengingatkan supaya haiwan yang mempunyai jangka hayat 100 tahun itu tidak diganggu sama ada semasa sedang naik ke darat, ketika berada di darat atau dalam perjaianan turun semula ke laut.

“Perbuatan mengganggu penyu juga boleh disabitkan kesalahan di bawah Seksyen 12B Enakmen Penyu 1951 (pindaan 1987) dan boleh dikenakan hukuman denda tidak melebihi RM1,000 atau penjara tidak melebihi enam bulan atau kedua-duanya jika sabit kesalahan,” katanya.

Isnin lalu, seekor penyu agar berusia lingkungan antara 15 hingga 18 tahun dikesan mendarat berhampiran hotel di Pantai Batu Buruk di sini antara jam 7 petang hingga 8.50 malam.

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Saving the dugong

Sightings of the marine mammal are increasingly rare in waters off Johor

By ZAZALI MUSA
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BACK in the 1960s and 1970s, the waters off Gelang Patah on the west coast of Johor were the favourite playgrounds of the dugong, also known as the sea cow.

A major reason for that was because the area was abundant with spoon seagrass, the main diet of the mammal.

However, vast development taking place in south Johor, especially in the past two decades or so, has led to dwindling numbers of the marine mammal.

"Local fishermen used to catch glimpses of the shy creatures but such moments are very rare these days," said Rolen Oni from Kampung Simpang Arang in Gelang Patah,

located about 50km from Johor Baru city. The 40-year-old fisherman, from the indigenous Orang Seletar community, said he first saw a dugong, almost five metres long, when he was 16 years old.

Rolen, who has been going to sea since he was eight years old, said from stories told by older fishermen in the village, there were about 200 to 300 dugongs five decades ago. "But their numbers have decreased and I worry that the animal may possibly be on the verge of extinction," he said.

He recalled an incident in 2004, where a 30kg baby dugong got caught in a fishing net.

He said the village fishermen's chief at that time, Tang King Tong, managed to convince the fisherman to release the dugong back into the sea.

"It was still a baby. Its mother was roaring near the shore as if waiting for her baby to be released," he added.

Rolen said he experienced a similar incident in 2003, when two dugongs — an adult female about 500kg and a 40kg baby dugong — got caught in a fishing net.

He said it happened when he was out fishing in Tanjung Bin, which was rich with seagrass, located about 50km from Kampung Simpang Arang.

"I dived into the water to release them. "When they were freed, the baby immediately suckled at its mother," he recalled.

He revealed that according to the beliefs of Orang Seletar fishermen, when releasing a trapped dugong, they should ask the creature to "bless" them with a bountiful catch.

"I did just that, and that day I returned home happy with a good catch from the sea," said Rolen.

Orang Seletar are one of the 18 Orang Asli ethnic groups in Malaysia and considered part of the Orang Laut (sea nomads) of the Straits of Johor, which separates Singapore and peninsular Malaysia.

There are about 3,000 Orang Seletar living in south Johor in nine villages — Kampung Bakar Batu Perling, Kampung Teluk Kabung, Kampung Simpang Arang, Kampung Sungai Temun, Kampung Pasir Salam, Kampung Pasir Putih, Kampung Kuala Masai, Kampung Teluk Jawa and Kampung Kong Kong.

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A baby dugong found in the seagrass meadows of Tanjung Adang near Gelang Patah in 2010. (Right) A 3.1m male dugong found dead in Tanjung Kupang, Gelang Patah in 2019. — Photos: THOMAS YONG/The Star and courtesy of Dr Serina Rahman and Affendi Yang Amri

At risk from human activities

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Rolen said that in 2018 and 2020, fishermen found the carcasses of two adult dugongs floating in the sea near the village — one died after swallowing plastic waste and the other died due to injuries from ship propellers.

He said his most recent sighting of the mammals was in March this year, in the waters off Tanjung Kupang at around 8am — an adult dugong and its baby that swam alongside his boat.

Superstitions

Rolen claimed that in the old days, it was common practice for the Orang Seletar to consume dugong meat, which tastes like beef.

“The best part was thought to be the belly. People in my community would normally make a curry or stir-fry the meat with chillies,” he said, although he himself had never eaten dugong meat.

There was also a belief, he said, that the teardrops of dugong had magical powers and that the *bomoh* (shaman) used it to make love potions.

“Some people have even offered money, up to RM1,000, in requesting us to collect the teardrops of a living dugong,” he added.

The superstitions surrounding the dugong were many among Orang Seletar.

Rolen pointed out that the bones of the dugong would be hung at the main door of a house to prevent intruders and spirits from entering.

Mohammad Irfan Yazid, 23, the



Dr Serina emphasises the importance of protecting and preserving seagrass, which dugongs feed on.



Irfan says Kelab Alami works closely with local fishermen from Gelang Patah to compile information on dugongs.



According to Rolen, it is very rare to catch a glimpse of dugongs in waters off Gelang Patah these days.

manager of Kelab Alami, said a carcass of a 50kg baby dugong was found floating in the sea near Pulau Merambong in June last year.

“We believe the creature died after it got trapped in a fishing net,” he said.

Kelab Alami works closely with some 40 fishermen from the Gelang Patah area to compile information on dugong.

The information is gleaned from the fishermen when they spot the animal while fishing at sea.

Irfan said fishermen were required to inform Johor Fisheries Department when they find dead dugong, for record purposes.

But on that occasion, they had no choice but to immediately bury the carcass as it had started to emit a foul smell.

“We can spot the dugong grazing trail on the seabed during low tide,” he added.

The waters of Gelang Patah,

especially near Pulau Merambong, Tanjung Kupang and Tanjung Adang, are rich in seagrass, the favourite grazing ground for dugongs in the west coast of Johor.

Meanwhile, visiting fellow from ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute Singapore, Dr Serina Rahman said that five to seven dugongs were spotted in the waters of Gelang Patah in March this year.

“Consider yourself lucky if you have seen these shy creatures swimming near you,” she said.

Dr Serina, who has conducted research on the dugong, said their presence could be determined by the marks on their feeding trails in areas rich with seagrass.

“Before the Johor Causeway was built in 1919 and completed in 1924, dugongs could travel from the east coast of Johor to the west coast of the state within a day,” she said.

“These days, however, the creatures are exposed to risk when they travel as they have to make a

long detour and pass the busy Straits of Malacca.

“They could get injured from propellers of passing vessels or get caught in fishing nets,” she added.

Researchers who conducted studies in recent years had spotted about 25 dugongs in the waters of Pulau Sibu and Pulau Tinggi in Mersing.

“But I cannot confirm whether the dugongs from the two islands in the east coast of Johor still travel to Gelang Patah to feed on the seagrass there,” said Dr Serina.

She theorised that the creatures most probably travelled to Pulau Tioman in Pahang, as the area near the island was also rich in seagrass.

She said their grazing marks were only visible during low tide — which occurred about three to four times a month — and the different patches on the seabed showed the mammals were there to feed on the seagrass.

There are two species of seagrass which the dugongs feed on — *halodule ovalis* and *halodule sp* — which are also home to seahorses, alligator pipefish (*korek telinga buaya*) and stingray.

She said saltwater or estuarine crocodiles, bottlenose dolphins, hawksbill turtles and green turtles could also be spotted in the waters off Gelang Patah, especially near Pulau Merambong, which is rich with seagrass.

Crustaceans as well as seahorses can camouflage themselves on the seabed to hide from predators.

“It is important to protect and preserve the seagrass as it is a favourite breeding ground for prawns and crabs too,” Dr Serina said.

She pointed out that this would support coastal fishermen.

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'On the precipice of extinction'

By ZAZALI MUSA
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THERE are several databases set up by researchers for dugong sightings and estimates of their population in different parts of the country, but particularly in Johor, Sabah and Sarawak.

Institute of Ocean and Earth Sciences (IOES), Universiti Malaya research officer Affendi Yang Amri said the movement patterns of the mammal were sketchy.

"No one has managed to tag and track any dugong in the southern parts of Johor," he said.

The IOES team led by him tried to capture and place satellite tags on dugongs in 2005, but they were unsuccessful.

He said this was due to the dugong's shy nature and wariness of boats.

It is also because of the lack of

shallow water areas in which they can "trap" the creatures.

"The population of dugong in south Johor is currently unknown, but there have been reports of dugongs sighted and of their feeding trails in seagrass meadows," said Affendi.

He said there had been reports of increasing numbers of dugong strandings in recent years, as well as declining seagrass habitats and increasing water pollution, which all point to a high probability of a decline in the dugong population.

He explained that any land reclamation activities that damaged the seagrass meadows would constitute a major factor in the animal's decline as seagrass was the dugong's main food source.

"If there are no significant seagrass meadows in an area, no dugong can survive nor will they want to migrate to the area."

He said the migration pattern of dugongs in Gelang Patah, Kukup and Pontian was unknown.

According to researchers, dugongs have been sighted in Singapore waters and in waters off the nearby Indonesian islands of Batam and Bintan, where there are good seagrass meadows.

"I personally believe the dugongs in south Johor are on the precipice of extinction, if no measures are taken to protect the mammal," said Affendi.

He said it was crucial to compile data on the dugong in Johor, especially in south Johor, because of the high human impact in the area.

The state government could offer more long-term research grants to monitor and study the dugong and their seagrass habitats, he suggested.

Other avenues, he added, included meetings with the locals, espe-



Declining seagrass meadows are a threat to not only dugongs but also other marine life like the seahorse which hide in it from predators.

cially fishermen, to have their input on seagrass and dugongs in the area, as well as annual meetings where all interested parties could share their experiences and knowledge.