Mangroves make way for prawn breeding

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KUALA SELANGOR, Apr 10:

An 8km stretch of mangrove forest at the southern end of the Kuala Selangor Nature Park has been cleared for breeding prawns.

The stretch was part of the Banjar Selatan Forest Reserve and one of the most productive of coastal ecosystems.

Park manager Andrew Sebastian said the forest was cleared two years ago.

"We were quite surprised when we saw the bulldozers," he said.

"We approached the Selangor Forestry Department and it was then that we found out that the land had been degazetted."

Park authorities are wondering why such a large area was degazetted purely for aquaculture, especially when it is well known that mangrove swamp water is too acidic for marine life and additional costs are incurred by the owners to neutralise the water.

"The wildlife and community in this area came to exist because of the mangrove forest. It has sustained man and animals for years," said Sebastian, adding that the prawn-breeding activities have had an adverse effect on the ecosystem of the surrounding areas.

"The birds from the park now fly over here for the easy pickings; the otters from the lake try to swim over as well.

"To make matters worse, the owners of the farm have put nets along the boundaries which trap the birds and the otters, which are left in the snares."

A visit to the site showed several adjoining forest areas turned into dumping
grounds for plastic bags used to hold prawn feed.

The Kuala Selangor Nature Park is one of the few pockets of greenery left in the area.

This has led to more people going to the park, but not all are there for recreation.

Some go to gather shellfish and plants for their livelihood.

An official of the Forestry Department of Peninsular Malaysia said the land had been degazetted two years ago and as such, it had no authority over it.

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