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TOP STORIES



Too cruel

Someone slashed this wild boar. So rangers, vets go on week-long search in Pulau Ubin to find and treat it

By Teh Jen Lee

IT was a call about a slash-and-dash. A close contact called me with disturbing news.

'Priscilla has been slashed with a knife. Don't know who did it, we're looking for her tomorrow.'

The next day, I found myself on Pulau Ubin, 10 of us piled into two rough-terrain vehicles, bumping along a dirt road until we reached Chek Jawa beach.

A motley crew of National Parks Board (NParks) rangers, photographers, researchers, vets and a journalist - looking for Priscilla.

Who is Priscilla?

Priscilla is a Chek Jawa native.

A friendly wild boar who doesn't hesitate to push her snout through the sand, chomping noisily on roots, fruits and even crabs.

She is used to humans because a former Chek Jawa villager Chu Yok Choon, 58, hand-raised her for five years.

When the village was cleared for reclamation, he left the 50kg oinker behind, but would check on her every now and then.

Mr Chu was the first person to see the gash about 15cm long and 2cm deep on her left buttock on May 26th. Her short tail, which she usually wags like a dog, also suffered a cut.

The taxi driver said in Mandarin: 'I don't know who would be so cold-hearted. I was afraid the wound may get infected with maggots, so I told NParks.'

And that's how a 10-strong search-and-rescue team came to be on the island - looking for one lone pig.

Singapore Zoo veterinary director Paolo Martelli happened to go to Chek Jawa on the same day.

He found out about Priscilla's injury.

'It was my day off, I was asked to help. In case she needed anaesthesia, I brought the drugs which had to be kept in a cooler,' said Dr Martelli.

His girlfriend, also a vet, came along.

We walked up and down the beach, shouting 'Priscilla!'

Normally, the perky porker would appear when she hears voices. But even after three hours, there was no sign of her.

Dr Martelli left instructions and medication with NParks rangers, who continued to look out for her hairy shadow over the next week.

One ranger said: 'It's the island's pig, we have to help.'

There were fleeting sightings but finally last Tuesday, the rangers were able to bring her into a fenced area for treatment.

Poor Pris walked with a slight limp, but she allowed the rangers to get close so they could clean her wound with sterile saline and iodine. They also gave her the anti-maggot tablets and antibiotics to fight off infections.

Dr Martelli was e-mailed a picture of the wound. He said it seems to be healing nicely, but he will make a piggy-call soon to be sure.

TODAY'S NEWS!

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Volunteer guides will soon be putting up signs asking visitors not to feed or touch Priscilla, who has since returned to being a beach babe.

While there are other wild boars on the island, they shy away from people - unlike Priscilla. Maybe she should be more careful too.

Mr Joseph Lai, a botanist who helps in research at Chek Jawa, said: 'She's special but let her be as wild as possible. She's very capable of finding her own food, so don't make her dependent on people.'

This little piggy got lost and found... at sea

THEY'RE used to spotting illegal immigrants trying to enter Singapore by sea.

But a wild boar swimming in the sea?

So when the Police Coast Guard spotted this little fellow swimming near the SAF jetty in Changi last Thursday, they promptly rescued it and called NParks Ubin.

An Ubin volunteer said: 'We didn't know if it's a boy or a girl and we wanted a name starting with P-R-I after Priscilla the Pig, so this is Pringles the Piglet.'

Wild boar are born with white stripes down their backs that fade as they grow older. Measuring only 30cm across, Pringles is being kept in a safe place on the island to rest and recover.

So far it is feeding well, and can be seen munching on coconut chunks.

No potato chips for Pringles though.

SAVING CHEK JAWA

THE tidal flats of Chek Jawa on the eastern tip of Pulau Ubin were slated for reclamation at the end of 2001.

Luckily, a groundswell of public awareness about its diverse plants and animals resulted in a deferment by the Ministry of National Development.

A lot of work is still needed to protect this piece of Singapore's natural coast, said dentist and nature photographer Dr Chua Ee Kiam in his book, Chek Jawa: Discovering Singapore's Biodiversity.

Some problems are over-exposure to visitors and exploitation by souvenir hunters and fishermen. While researchers monitor the impact of trampling on organisms like the carpet anemone, NParks and volunteers organise guided walks to minimise damage.

Visitors must pre-register through the NParks Ubin Hotline (6542-4108) for a walk. The dates are released every three months at www.nparks.gov.sg/news/latestnews.shtml

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