

Singapore - Vesak 2004

Think again before freeing those animals

By Joann Tan, Straits Times Interactive, 25 May 2004

Singapore -- MANY Buddhists set captive animals free on Vesak Day as a compassionate gesture but some nature lovers are concerned that such acts can harm the environment.

They are hoping to reduce the number of animals released on June 2 by educating the public through exhibitions and direct intervention.



A popular choice for release, these red-eared sliders are competing for food with the native turtles.

The Nature Society of Singapore has organised a photo exhibition on Singapore's wildlife at the Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery at Bright Hill Road.

It aims to educate people on the adverse effects of releasing animals into the wild. It was opened last weekend and will be open again on June 1 and 2.

A spokesman for the monastery said it does not advise devotees against liberating animals but asks them to do it with wisdom. Mindful of ecological concerns and the laws on releasing animals in parks, he said: 'Those who want to release animals should try to release them into the habitat that they were already in. They can also try to release them in areas which are not prohibited by the law.'

Another exhibition on the effects of releasing animals into the wild will be organised by the National Parks Board (NParks) at the Bukit Timah Nature Reserve this weekend.

Also, a group of 50 nature lovers plans to advise the public against releasing animals by stationing themselves at the entrances of parks and reservoirs on Vesak Day. Devotees mostly release turtles, fish and birds.

An NParks survey in March and last month found up to 200 luohan in the Upper Seletar, Lower and Upper Peirce and MacRitchie reservoirs.

Mr Wong Tuan Wah, director of conservation at NParks, said: 'Animals released into a strange environment become stressed and may die eventually.' Veterinarian Fred Chua said even those which are able to adapt to the wild may upset the ecological balance.

He cited the example of the North American freshwater turtle (red-eared slider) which has colonised local reservoirs but are competing with the native Asian Box turtle for food and nesting space.

Under the National Parks Act, anyone found releasing any animal in

the reserves or parks can be fined up to \$10,000.

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