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# Stop killing wild birds needlessly

WE REFER to the article, 'BirdPark, Zoo to cull birds' (ST, Aug 27), and the letter, 'Wild pigeons and crows pose danger' (ST, Sept 3).

The reported action by Wildlife Reserves Singapore (WRS) in culling all the chickens, ducks and geese at the Jurong BirdPark, Singapore Zoo and Night Safari is questionable. There is no justification in engaging in 'pre-emptive culling' when no symptoms of avian flu of any form - of low or high virulence - have been detected in domestic or wild birds within its premises, or elsewhere.

It is a well-known fact among avian-flu experts that of the bird families only the ducks (and geese, etc) and gulls are more susceptible to avian flu, whereas shorebirds and passerines (perching birds) are significantly less susceptible.

It has also been established that only the low virulent form of avian flu is present in wild birds and that there has been no direct evidence that the disease is transmitted by wild birds to domesticated birds or humans. The avian flu in domestic fowls and ducks can develop into the highly virulent form when they are kept in large numbers in crowded conditions.

Given these findings, what we should be careful about is to ensure that wild ducks or gulls are prevented from coming into contact with domestic fowls or ducks in intensive farms.

There are nesting colonies of the Black-crowned Night Herons and Cattle Egrets within the bird park but these birds do not belong to the highly susceptible bird families. These are non-migratory and there is no evidence that they have been affected by avian flu. We hope that WRS is not indiscriminately culling these resident species of birds.

The proposal to trap and clip the wings of 'migratory birds' is very alarming. Which 'migratory birds' are involved? Whatever is meant, this action amounts to killing the birds because if their wings are clipped they would lose their capacity to fly and would be unable to find sufficient food to survive.

We hope the authorities can clarify these issues.

The report also mentioned that crows and mynahs will be culled. Apart from the House Crow and the Javan and Common Mynah, which are not protected under the Wild Animals and Birds Act, are other species of mynahs and the other resident crow (the Large-billed Crow) going to be culled as well? Crows and mynahs are wild birds but such resident passerine birds are not known to be carriers of the avian-flu virus.

Unfortunately, such unwarranted actions by WRS to cull birds within its premises have given rise to the misconception among the public that all wild birds are dangerous carriers of avian flu.

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As is well-known by now, avian flu can become very deadly in its highly virulent form when it affects domesticated birds, such as chick-ens and ducks, that are kept in large numbers in crowded enclosures that are less than hygienic. What needs to be done is to seek a more humane way of doing such farming to produce healthy and resilient poultry.

The United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organisation has this to say: 'Eliminating wild birds is not an appropriate measure to control the spread of the avian influenza virus. Killing wild birds will not help to prevent future bird-flu outbreaks. Prevention must be based on a control-and-surveillance system to ensure that any contact between wild birds and poultry is avoided or at least monitored. For example, commercial poultry owners need to ensure that poultry pens and poultry drinking-water supplies cannot be contaminated by migrating birds. If this cannot be done, then making the drinking water safe by appropriately treating it is necessary.'

The positive step forward is to intensify research and accelerate the production of appropriate vaccines for people and domesticated birds.

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