

A new home for the hornbills

Don: Forest clearing moved them to Kg Sungai Panjang

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SABAK BERNAM: Welcome to the land of the Hornbills – and no, it's not in Sarawak. Kampung Sungai Panjang here has been playing host to hornbills which have made the village their roosting ground.

The birds migrated from the nearby Sungai Karang forest reserve to nest in clay jars and urns placed outside the houses of the villagers. Residents say the village now houses more than 20 hornbills.

Farmer Abdul Nasir Fairsol Abdul Rahman, 44, is hosting two different pairs of southern pied hornbills and saw new additions to their families recently.

"The hornbills first flew into the village three years ago, but were

mostly elusive and perched on trees. However, once they became familiar with the surroundings and the village folk, they started flying onto the compounds of our houses," Abdul Nasir said.

Universiti Putra Malaysia Science Faculty's biology department head Professor Ahmad Ismail said the survival of hornbills depended on the forest reserve ecology, adding that the birds' migration to the village could be the result of past clearing of the forest for settlement and agricultural activities.

The clearing work prompted the birds to look elsewhere for food.

The Sungai Karang forest forms part of the North Selangor Swamp Forest.

"Sungai Karang is vital as a source of water to irrigate the surroundings

rice fields and there is a need for greater protection of the forest and river system.

"When trees wither and die, the birds lose their primary food resources. And, they migrate to places where food is more readily available.

"This is why the Sungai Karang Forest Reserve needs to be protected so that it can hold up as a foraging and nesting area," he said.

Prof Ahmad still has no answer as to why the birds chose to breed inside the jars, adding that artificial nests might be made for the hornbills in the forest.

The southern pied hornbill (*anthracoceros albiorostris convexus*) has a long downward-curved bill. Its coat is primarily black except for the lower belly, legs and tail area where feathers are in shades of white.



Caring bird: A hornbill feeding its female partner that is nestled inside a jar left outside homes in Kampung Sungai Panjang.