



Crows taking off from a treetop in Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur. PIC BY ZULFADHLI ZULKIFLI

NUISANCE

CROWS ZOOM IN ON OUR GARBAGE, DIRT

Our unhygienic practices have contributed to their burgeoning population, writes
VEENA BABULAL

SURVIVORS of crow swoops in the Indian subcontinent all tell of similar encounters with the bird.

There is a distant caw, a flutter of wings, a black blur and suddenly, the curry puff in your hand is gone.

This may not be the norm in Malaysia, but the common house crow could become aggressive if left unchecked.

Monash University's School of Science Professor Sadequr Rahman said crows are "very intelligent" and the breed in Kuala Lumpur is genetically similar to the ones in Sri Lanka.

A study by a student of the university shows that some crows had "hitchhiked to Malaysia by ship".

"Their behavioural patterns and genetics are similar."

"As they are bright birds, they

adapt to their environment, not unlike humans.

"They flock to where there is food, and yes, if they think they can get away with snatching food, they will do it."

"It's like a person crossing the road when the light is red," said Sadequr, a professor of plant genetics and the director of the university's Tropical Medicine & Biology research platform.

He said the birds "aggregate in numbers when they are threatened", evoking an image similar to Alfred Hitchcock's movie, *The Birds*.

"If you attack one, they will come around and attack you."



Crow droppings on a pavement in Jalan Ara, Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur. PIC BY ZUNNUR AL SHAFIQ

"I have not seen this here, but I saw it when I was a child in Bangladesh."

"They travel in pairs and are quite social, so that they can call out for help when they are hurt," he said, adding that crows from Singapore and Penang are genetically diverse.

On whether unhygienic practices contributed to their presence, he said "yes", adding that crows "love being near people as they are a source of food supplies through discarded food".

"Crows will eat anything, so the likelihood of diseases spreading is there."



Kuala Lumpur's City Hall enforcement department shoots between 4,400 and 5,400 crows in 15 to 18 operations annually. PIC BY MUHD ZAABA ZAKERIA

Zoologist Dr Hafidzi Mohd Noor said while culling is essential to keep their population in check, it is not the solution to the problem.

The associate professor at Universiti Putra Malaysia said Malaysians cannot escape the winged vermin as long as their cities are dirty and garbage left lying around.

"If we fail to get our act together, we will have to deal with them and they will multiply and become a nuisance, as well as start being aggressive."

"They will spread diseases. In the United States, they were known to have spread the West Nile virus, similar to what caused the Japanese Encephalitis outbreak in Malaysia," he said, adding that they are usually found in cities due to the abundance of food sources.

He said crows from Sri Lanka were introduced by coffee planter John Edward Valentine Carey on Pulau Carey in 1902 to get rid of crop-eating insects, but the birds became more populous instead.

In the Klang municipality, there were an average of 7,000 birds shot from 2010 to 2014.

In Kuala Lumpur, City Hall's enforcement department shoots between 4,400 and 5,400 crows in 15 to 18 operations annually.

Other hotspots for crows include

Bangsar in Kuala Lumpur.

Bukit Bandaraya Residents Association adviser Datuk M. Ali said it is surprising that eagles have not come to Bangsar as crows and other vermin were prolific in the neighbourhood.

"They don't just hang around the TMC area in Lucky Garden where the wet market is. They are spreading to surrounding areas like Bukit Bandaraya and Bangsar Park."

"One reason is because shooting is ineffective."

"The crows are finding other food sources."

"Some residents feed them as part of their custom."

"Just go to the back lanes where they do this and you will find pigeons, crows and rats."

"If you are unlucky, you might even find snakes."

Ali, who said he was not against such a custom, however, said this should be carried out in suitable places.

He called on City Hall to take action by issuing summonses to residents.

City Hall Health and Environment director Datin Dr Noor Akma Shabudin said if the practice is found to be a nuisance and a health hazard, the authorities will be forced

to issue compounds.

She said shooting is the only method of control as using poison as bait poses a risk to pets.



Dr Hafidzi Mohd Noor



Datin Dr Noor Akma Shabudin

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