Zoo plans to release more milky storks

HOPE FOR ENDANGERED SPECIES: Spurred by the success of its captive breeding programme, Zoo Negara will release storks into the wild in July, writes Ling Poh Lean

The success of its release programme involving six milky storks three years ago has prompted Zoo Negara, in cooperation with the Wildlife and National Parks Department (Permhillan), to contemplate releasing the birds again.

The number to be released in July, however, has yet to be determined.

"We are going big this time around as we have succeeded in multiplying the number of the birds in our second attempt three years ago," Zoo Negara director Dr Mohamad Ngah said yesterday. From the six released, the number had increased to 12, he added.

The birds, which are scientifically known as myceria cinerea, were set free at the Marang mangrove forest in Kuala Gula, Perak.

"Due to the encouraging results from our last attempt, we will release more birds this time. The number of birds to be feed, however, will depend on the support system to be provided by Perhilitan," he said, adding that discussions were underway to ensure the success of the release programme.

"We also need the support from the public. They must not harm the birds."

He said the release programme was initiated in 1998 after Zoo Negara realised they were disappearing at an alarming rate.

He said Zoo Negara was the first and only zoo in the country that initiated such a programme.

All the birds released in Kuala Gula were tagged with two chips — a radar to identify their location and an identification chip.

"The released milky storks are being monitored by our officers. We are also assisted by Perhilitan to fight poaching," Mohamad said nestling poles and feeding ponds were prepared for the birds in Kuala Gula to ensure their survival.

Despite failure in its first release attempt at Kuala Selangor a decade ago, Mohamad expressed confidence that the July programme would be successful.

"We will never stop learning and improving ourselves," he said, adding that the Kuala Selangor release was a flop because the birds were attacked by monkeys.

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Zoo Negara started its captive breeding project in 1997, with the procurement of seven milky storks from Singapore and three from Johor Zoo. It has since bred 250 birds. It currently has 750 tailed storks, 80 milky storks and three stork's storks.

Milky storks frolicking in the sun at Zoo Negara, Hulu Klang, Selangor. Pic by Chan Wai Yew

Milky Stork (Myceria Cinerea)

**Key Facts**

- **Vulnerable**
- **Gicoulidae (Storks)**
- **Population size**: 5,000 mature individuals (fewer than 5000 in Indonesia, fewer than 80 in Malaysia, 20 to 10 in Cambodia)
- **Distribution size (breeding/habitat)**: 110,0000 sq km
- **About 92-97cm tall**
- **White stork with thick, yellowish bill and black flight feathers**
- **Jawbone has pale brown, more protruded head and neck, and darker wing-coverts contrasting sharply with upper parts**
- **Undergoes a rapid population decline owing to ongoing loss of coastal habitats, human disturbance, hunting and trade**
- **It is a predominantly coastal resident in Indonesia and Malaysia, inhabiting mangroves and adjacent, less saline, swamps.**
- **It forages on tidal mudflats, in saline pools, freshwater marshes, fishponds and palm fields. Only found inland in flooded forest around TAir Sap lake in Cambodia, from where they disperse during the wet season.**

**Sources**

BirdLife International: a global partnership of conservation organisations that strives to conserve birds, their habitats and global biodiversity, working with people towards sustainability in the use of natural resources.