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NCTF funds 117 conservation projects with RM22.59 mln allocation

BUKIT MERTAJAM: The National Conservation Trust Fund (NCTF) under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability has funded a total of 117 conservation projects involving an allocation of RM22.59 million.

Minister Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad said that of the total, 72 projects are in the implementation phase with a funding commitment of RM6.59 million, while 35 projects have been completed with an allocation of RM14.2 million.

"One of the completed projects is the Conservation of Seladang in the Royal Belum State Park-Temenggor Forest Reserve Complex, implemented by the non-governmental organisation Borneo Rhino Alliance in collaboration with the Department of Wildlife and National Parks (Perhilitan) and brought to the Second National Biodiversity Council.

"The meeting recognises the Seladang as an endangered species of national importance, and a Seladang Conservation Management Plan will be developed to stabilise its population," he said in his closing speech for the Biology Exploration Workshop (Avian) with the Seberang Perai Community at Dewan Kampung Pisang, Cheruk Tokun here yesterday.

His speech was read by Forest Research Institute of Malaysia director-general Datuk Dr Ismail Parlan.

Also present was Nature Sustainable Ecosystem Society (NEST) chairman Sulaiman Salikan.

Elaborating, Nik Nazmi said data from the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Perhilitan found that a bird species that went extinct around the 1960s was the green peafowl (*pavo muticus*), while the species currently facing the threat of extinction include the Malayan crested argus and the mountain peacock-pheasant.

He added that the causes of extinction include loss of habitat due to logging and development, illegal trade in exotic birds as well



Ismail (left) checks out bird-related books featured at the Biology Exploration Workshop. — Bernama photo

as illegal hunting and keeping of wild birds as pets.

"Malaysia has 814 bird species and, of that total, 697 are found in the peninsula while 55 species are endemic, with 48 of them found in Borneo (Sabah and Sarawak).

"Birds play an important role in maintaining environmental balance, including serving as indicators of ecosystem health, with the number and type of birds in an area reflecting whether that area is healthy or polluted," he said.

Meanwhile, Avian coordinator Dr Siti Norasikin Ismail said that NEST had previously collaborated with the Shorebird Peninsular Malaysia Project in carrying out coastal bird-watching activities, which attracted the interest of bird enthusiasts and researchers from various backgrounds, thus boosting the birdwatching industry in Seberang Perai.

She said that as part of the next step to completing the list of bird species found in Seberang Perai, NEST began a study to list out the forest birds in three main locations, namely the Bukit Panchor Permanent

Forest Reserve, Air Hitam Forest Reserve and Bukit Mertajam Forest Reserve.

"This activity is crucial for understanding local biodiversity and promoting conservation interests among local communities and the findings from this study will be compiled and presented in the form of illustrated pamphlets and short videos, which will be distributed to the public and local communities.

"Its main aim is to raise awareness, foster a love for the environment as well as encourage community involvement in conservation efforts," she said.

She said the two-day workshop aimed to draw closer to the local community and expose participants to field birdwatching activities, where they are divided into six groups and accompanied by facilitators to help identify bird species.

"We hope that through this initiative, we can further strengthen efforts to preserve the natural ecosystem in Seberang Perai and make this area the main destination for birdwatching and environmental-related activities," she said. — Bernama