

The Straits Times

4 March 2010

Rare deer knocked down by car on SLE

By Alexis Cai

A rare Sambar Deer, once thought to have become extinct, became roadkill yesterday when it was hit by a car at dawn on the Seletar Expressway (SLE).

Malaysian tourist Chong Chiew Pin was driving a friend to the airport when he thought he saw something "floating" just ahead of him in the dark. It was too late when he realised it was a deer that had come out of the undergrowth along Mandai Road.

The deer, about 1.2m tall, was not a runaway from the Night Safari nearby, which has a sambar deer enclosure.

No one knows how many sambar deer there are in the wild here, according to Mr Subaraj Rajathurai, chairman of the Vertebrate Study Group at the Nature Society (Singapore). He estimates there are fewer than 20 in Singapore. These shy creatures are one of the two native species of deer, the other being the barking deer.

But last year, a pair of males were sighted at Bukit Brown cemetery, near the MacRitchie Nature Reserve. There were also sightings in Mandai Lake Road, near the Upper Seletar Reservoir.

Sambar deer are slightly bigger than most other deer, growing a height up to 2m. They are also found in Malaysia, Sri Lanka and other parts of Asia.

Mr Chong, 49, said he was driving in the rightmost lane at about 5am when the deer came into his headlights.

"We were shocked and my friend was yelling," he said. "I stepped on the brakes but it rammed into my car and its antlers poked a hole through my windscreen."

The right side of the bumper was damaged and the right side mirror broke off. The impact also dislodged the 120kg deer's right antler and left it with a deep gash near its hip, above its right hind leg.

Bleeding from the nose, it lay where it was hit for more than four hours before zoo veterinarians put it to sleep. It was estimated to be three or four years old.

Society of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) executive officer Deirdre Moss said the SPCA could not reach the zoo at that hour, so it called the Animal Concerns Research and Education Society (ACRES), which has more expertise in handling wild animals.

Dr Megan Williamson, an Australisan vet with ACRES, arrived at the scene at 7am. "The deer was unable to stand up and looked quite distressed," she said.

ACRES did not have the resources to immobilise such a big animal and transport it to a treatment facility. Dr Williamson stayed with it until a team of six from the zoo arrived at about 9.20am. The zoo vets put it to sleep on the spot.