

My Paper

20 October 2010

Yikes, snakes in the heartland

AS CONCRETE jungle replaces more and more of Singapore's natural habitat, it is inevitable that some wild animals, such as giant snakes, would find their way into urban areas.

Two pythons were spotted in the past few days in Bendemeer and Tanjong Pagar, alarming passers-by such as information-technology executive C. H. Seah.

Last Saturday, the 42-year-old noticed a group of construction workers causing a commotion at a canal in Bendemeer's St George Lane, and so walked up to take a closer look.

To his shock, he discovered that they were crowding around a 4m-long python. He sent a photograph of the reptile to citizen-journalism website Stomp.

Another python was spotted yesterday outside Tanjong Pagar's Bestway Building in Prince Edward Road. The frightened animal almost bit a man who tried to catch it.

Mr Biswajit Guha, director of zoology at the Singapore Zoo, advised the public to avoid approaching wild snakes, especially if they appear to be weak, injured or disoriented.

"If you come across a non-venomous snake, such as a python, it would be best to leave it alone and give it a clear path to exit," he said.

He added that if the snake remained in a public area, the public can then contact Wildlife Reserves Singapore (WRS) for help.

Snakes caught by WRS (tel: 6269- 3411) undergo quarantine and health evaluations, and some may be microchipped, rehabilitated and released back into the wild.

WRS has received 127 snakes so far this year. They include those confiscated by the Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority.

"Snakes prefer thickly planted areas or quiet dark corners," Mr Guha said. "It would be best to keep residential and public areas clear of clutter so that there are no hiding places for them."

The public can also call the Animal Concerns Research and Education Society (Acres, tel: 6892-9821) or any pest-control service if a snake is sighted in a public area. Police should be alerted only if the reptile poses imminent danger.

An Acres spokesman said the society receives about 60 calls each month about snake sightings.

Pest-control companies usually release the snakes into nature reserves or hand them over to WRS.