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Nature

'HUNGRY'

'Hot weather forces snakes to leave habitat for food'

KUALA TERENGGANU: If you think snakes will seek shelter in your house during this hot and dry weather, you are right. But the other reason they're leaving their habitats is because the heat makes snakes hungry and they will go where rats are aplenty.

Civil Defence Department records showed that between January and March 5, the department had caught 1,046 snakes, including pythons, the venomous king cobra and the equally dangerous pit vipers in Terengganu.

State Civil Defence chief Lieutenant-Colonel Che Adam A. Rahman said this was a seven per cent increase from the number of snakes caught in the same period

last year, and it could increase before the dry season was over.

"We are working with the Wildlife and National Parks Department, which the snakes were handed over and released at locations unknown to us, but far from human habitation," he told the *New Straits Times*.

Che Adam said apart from the heat, the snakes were also trying to escape the destruction of its habitat due to development.

"Snakes need to survive and they will go to areas where there is food. Residential areas are the closest place where they can catch rats," he added.

Dr Teo Eng Wah, a senior lecturer from the Centre of Sport and

Exercise Science, Universiti Malaysia, who is one of the fewer than 10 herpetologists in the country, said the hypotheses that snakes leave their habitats to breed during the hot and dry period was incorrect.

"Snakes breed during the wet season due to the abundance of food source.

"It is the extreme heat that forces snakes to seek refuge in residential areas, primarily to look for food and shelter," he said.

He said people should not try to catch the snakes unless they were properly equipped and trained to handle the reptiles, whether or not the creature is venomous.



Herpetologist Dr Teo Eng Wah says people should not try to catch snakes unless they are properly trained to handle them.

"Avoid contact. The next best way to prevent snakes from appearing in or near your house is to make sure that the surroundings are clear of rubbish or leftover food, which attracts rats.

"But if you stumble into one, call agencies that handle such creatures.

"Some species of snakes are in as many years.

protected, like those in the cobra family.

"Some of the smaller species, such as the venomous pit vipers are not easily spotted, unlike the huge king cobra or python. But most snakes will avoid human contact," added Teo, who had been bitten four times by snakes