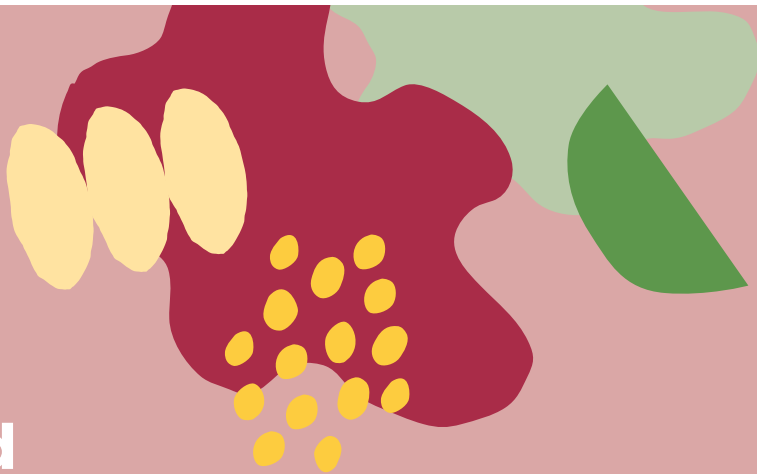




CITES & LIVELIHOODS CASE STUDY 2022

Asian Monitor Lizard Harvest and Trade in Peninsular Malaysia



MALAYSIA



**ASIAN WATER
MONITOR**
Varanus salvator



APPENDIX II



LEAST CONCERN

SPECIES, USE AND TRADE

Asian Water Monitors (*Varanus salvator*) are common and widespread in Malaysia. In many areas they are considered a pest because they prey on household livestock and occasionally attack humans. Historically, they have been harvested for food - the meat is a traditional delicacy - but also for skins and medicinal purposes (e.g., fat, gall bladders). Commercial trade in skins for the manufacture of luxury leather goods began in the mid-20th century. The harvest affords marginalised rural communities the opportunity to increase wellbeing and

strengthen livelihood resilience. Harvesting efforts are focused on anthropogenic landscapes such as water canals and oil palm plantations. The government wildlife management authority (PERHILITAN) regulates offtake by means of a quota system. Quotas are set annually according to a science-based field monitoring programme, and registered hunters purchase harvest quotas from PERHILITAN according to availability. The water monitor remains common in Malaysia even in those regions subject to high levels of harvests.



LIVELIHOOD BENEFITS

The majority of the harvest is carried out by indigenous Orang Asli hunters. Most Orang Asli live in rural areas where poverty and malnutrition rates are high. Approximately 1,000 registered hunters harvest approximately 80,000 monitor lizards per year. The first stages in the supply chain (harvesters and processing facilities that export the skins) generate approximately US\$1 million per annum. Thus, > 80% of the value of skins accrues to hunters and local processing facilities in rural areas. Although some of the meat is exported, much of it is consumed locally.

The trade in monitor lizards, which are an open-access and continuously available resource, also helps to strengthen livelihood resilience against economic downturns (e.g., unemployment) and environmental shocks (droughts, flooding). Overall, the trade in monitor lizards provides a stable source of income, a nutritious source of food, and a means of preserving identity and cultural heritage. It also helps to control an economically and socially important pest species.



CONSERVATION IMPACTS

Monitor lizard populations have benefited from agricultural land transformation due to diminished predators (e.g. extirpation of large carnivores and raptors) and increased habitat and prey (e.g., water canals and crop pests). They are now one of the most abundant large vertebrates in Malaysia. Long term monitoring and research has revealed no negative impacts of the harvest programme on their conservation status, even in heavily harvested areas. Research has shown that without the legal trade in monitor lizards, many hunters would lose a source of livelihood and be incentivised to poach threatened species (e.g., pangolins).

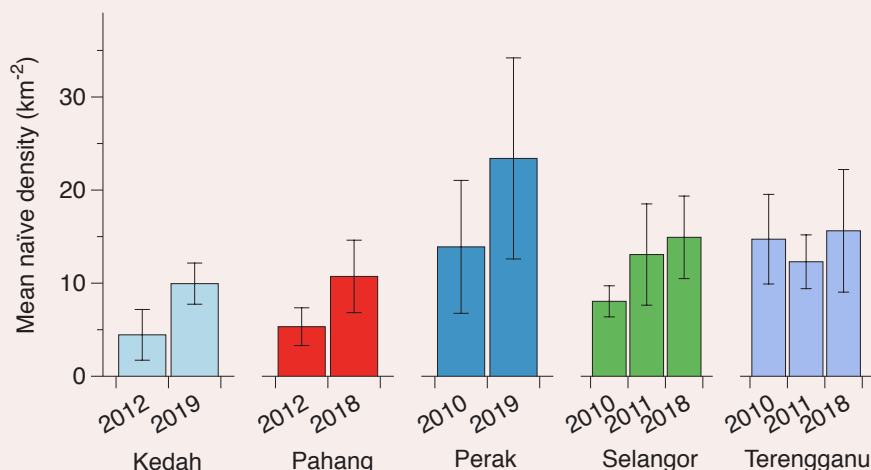


Fig. 2. Mean naïve density estimates of *Varanus salvator* between years at five sites in Peninsular Malaysia subject to harvest.

LESSONS LEARNED AND DIRECTIONS

The trade in monitor lizard skins from Malaysia provides a basic income for marginalised communities, reduces human-wildlife conflict, and strengthens livelihood resilience. A key success factor in delivering these benefits to vulnerable rural communities has been strong governance by the Malaysian Wildlife Department (clear rules and expectations that are effectively enforced), and an understanding from local and international stakeholders that livelihoods must be considered when making business decisions impacting the supply chain.

A key challenge, however, has been in communicating the programme to the general public and to key policy makers so that the science behind the sustainable use of wild monitor lizard populations is

clear. The lack of effective communication has resulted in poor understanding and decision making (e.g., restricted quotas and emotive calls for trade bans), which has undermined consumer support, the value of the harvest, and the overall sustainability benefits of the programme.

A key lesson for CITES implementation is to encourage and support effective communication between all stakeholders. Evidence that harvests are non-detrimental to wild populations and that trade is legal, transparent, humane, and traceable will depend largely on continued supply chain improvements and effective communication of the science underpinning - and benefits derived from - this trade.

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IN COLLABORATION WITH:



Sustainable Use
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