

Cyber spotting: Youths urged to help track illegal wildlife trade online

Friday, 10 Apr 2026

KOTA KINABALU: Digital monitoring by the community, especially youths, can be an effective way to combat the illegal wildlife trade, participants at a forum here were told.

They also learned of Sabah's many unique and endangered species, such as the orang utan, Bornean elephant, Sunda pangolin, Bornean banteng and proboscis monkey.

These species face continued threats from poaching, illegal trade and habitat loss, the forum highlighted, while pointing out growing concerns over the shift of wildlife trafficking to digital platforms.

The forum here on Friday (April 10) was hosted by Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Malaysia, and called for wildlife defenders to combat this illicit trade.

UMS said that while digital platforms are now seen as contributing to the worsening wildlife trafficking, they can also be used to monitor and report such activities to protect Sabah's biodiversity.

UMS Institute of Tropical Biology and Conservation (ITBC) director Associate Prof Dr Fiffy Hanisdah Saikim, representing UMS vice-chancellor Prof Datuk Dr Kassim Mansor, said universities have an important role in empowering students in many areas.

This includes pushing them to become responsible stewards of the environment, she said, explaining that universities are not only centres of learning and research but also platforms for nurturing responsible citizens.

"Engaging students in conservation initiatives allows them to contribute meaningfully to the protection of Sabah's natural heritage," she added.

Another key initiative highlighted during the forum was the Cyber Spotter Programme, which encourages the public to monitor online platforms and report suspicious wildlife trade activities.

The programme aims to strengthen community participation in wildlife protection while raising awareness about the dangers of the illegal wildlife trade.

Dr Rebecca Jumin, head of Conservation (Sabah) at WWF-Malaysia, emphasised the growing importance of monitoring illegal wildlife trade in digital spaces, noting that many transactions now take place online.

"Monitoring helps conservation organisations and enforcement agencies identify emerging trends and take action to protect vulnerable species," she said in a speech delivered by Dr Cheryl Cheah, project lead of the Sabah Landscapes Programme at WWF-Malaysia.

She added that the digital landscape is vast and constantly evolving, and there is only so much government agencies can monitor on their own.

"With greater support from youth and civil society acting as eyes and ears in the cyber world, we can put more hands on deck to detect and report online wildlife crime.

"This collective vigilance is crucial to protect Malaysia's wildlife from online exploitation," she added.

In addition to the forum sessions, participating organisations and government agencies hosted exhibition booths to showcase their roles and initiatives in wildlife conservation.

Attendees were invited to sign up for the Cyber Spotter Programme, which equips volunteers to help identify and report suspected online wildlife trade activities.