

First success for terrapin tag

NST 03/04/08 pg. 15

■ By Sean Augustin
sean@nst.com.my

SETIU: The state's first ever river terrapin tracking project has got off to a good start.

A three-year-old terrapin was tagged with an ultrasonic tracking device on Monday, and it was found the following day about 200 metres upstream from where it was released at Pak Lah Teh.

Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT) student Chen Pelf Nyok, tracked the reptile as part of a project by the UMT Turtle and Rehabilitation Group led by Prof Chan Eng Heng.

Aquaria KLCC is a co-sponsor of the tracking project, funding the purchase of the RM50,000 ultrasonic device.

The ultrasonic tracking device is a well-established research tool in freshwater ecosystems.

In addition to producing location signals, it also helps record animal behaviour through muscle activity and is superior to radio tracking

in brackish water.

The device comprises a briefcase-like tracking receiver, a hydrophone and a tag with a battery life of 700 days.

About 30 river terrapins aged from two to nine will be tagged and tracked for the project.

It is designed to determine the efficacy of the four-year-old Head Starting Project, in which terrapin hatchlings are raised in captivity till they are three years old and then released into Sungai Setiu. So far, 240 have been released.

Tracking the terrapins will also help identify and mitigate threats in their habitat.

"For now we will focus on one terrapin, and if it succeeds we will tag more. We are a little cautious as the tag alone costs RM1,000 and we had a bad experience with a radio tracking device last year.

"But yesterday was good. We were able to track the terrapin within 90 minutes, a success considering the length of Sungai Setiu," Chen said.



About 30 river terrapins similar to this one will be tagged and tracked for the project.