

Varsity to track river terrapins

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Universiti
Malaysia
Terengganu
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ultrasonic
devices on
river
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KUALA TERENGGANU: For the first time in the state, river terrapins will be tagged with ultrasonic tracking devices to monitor their behaviour.

The project, conducted by Universiti Malaysia Terengganu Turtle and Rehabilitation group, is to evaluate the viability of UMT's Head Start project and to fine tune it.

Under the programme, UMT has been raising river terrapin hatchlings in captivity and releasing them into Sungai Setiu when they are 3 years old. Since they started in 2004, 240 hatchlings have been released.

Project leader Professor Chan Eng Heng said it would tag 30 river terrapins.

"With the tracking device, we will know which part of the river they frequent, where they migrate to and where they feed. By knowing how and where they move, we can identify and reduce threats in the area.

"We will also find out if raising them in captivity for the

first few years does more harm than good," she told the *New Straits Times*.

Ultrasonic devices are being used because they are more efficient in brackish water than radio devices.

Chan said the terrapins chosen for the project would come from different age groups, ranging from 2 to 9 years, to determine at which age it would be most beneficial to release them.

The project, said to cost around RM50,000, is co-funded by Aquaria KLCC, which is sponsoring the devices.

Aquaria Group managing director and chief executive officer Datuk Simon Foong said its collaboration with UMT was part of a memorandum of understanding signed with media investment group Media Prima in the conservation of turtles and terrapins.

"Terrapin numbers are dwindling and if we don't do something, they will become extinct."

Foong said: "Once the data is collected, we can work with UMT to improve their survival chances."