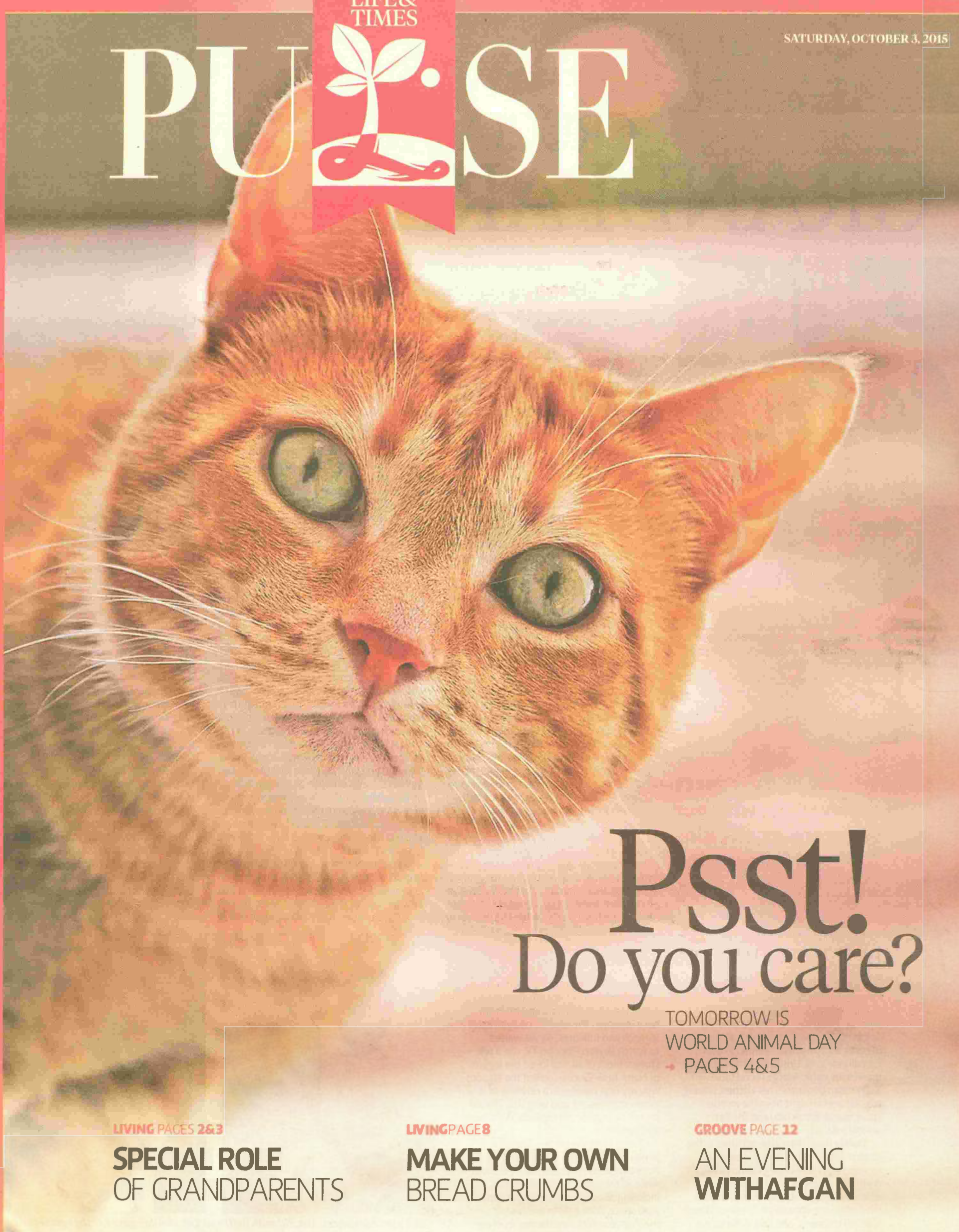


LIFE &
TIMES



PULSE

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 3, 2015



Psst! Do you care?

TOMORROW IS
WORLD ANIMAL DAY
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OF GRANDPARENTS**

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**MAKE YOUR OWN
BREAD CRUMBS**

GROOVE PAGE 12

**AN EVENING
WITH AFGAN**

BROUGHT TO YOU
BY LIFE & TIMES**PULSE** family*The Malayan Sun
Bear is not meant
to be kept as a pet.*

ALL CREATURES, COMPANION AND WILD

It's not only on World Animal Day that we should be treating all animals with love and respect, writes
Aneeta Sundararaj

A FEW months ago, a friend invited me to visit her new pet. All expectations of a kitten or puppy vanished within seconds of stepping into her flat. In the middle of her sitting room was a cage that housed a yellow python she had named Enigma. I beat a hasty retreat before I passed out. A week later, my distraught friend phoned to inform me that Enigma had escaped from its cage and must be slithering around the condominium block. She was puzzled why not a single neighbour wanted to help her look for her pet.

Ideally, had Enigma had a microchip inserted, it could have made locating and identifying the reptile easier. At least it's possible in theory, says Dr Clement Anthony, a veterinary surgeon in Kuala Lumpur, during our meeting in the run up to World Animal Day tomorrow.

"My patients have always been companion animals like dogs, cats, hamsters and guinea pigs," says this vet with over 30 years' of experience. "Recently, the Wildlife Department has made it a requirement that exotic pets be microchipped. So, I am now

seeing more Burmese and Ball pythons and, sometimes, a musang."

CORE PURPOSE

This 59-year-old vet adds that animals of any species will relate to man as long as we shower them with love and affection. "That is the core of the purpose of World Animal Day," he says.

Adding a religious connotation to this celebration, Dr Clement says that Oct 4 also coincides with the Catholic Feast Day of St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of animals.

On a website dedicated to World Animal Day, it is stated that it "is the one day of the year that embraces all animals and the unique concerns of each, in every country. It's a special opportunity to commemorate our love and respect for animals by doing something special to highlight their importance in the world. It unites the animal welfare movement, mobilising it into a global force for change".

Condensing this into one sentence: World Animal Day is a day to celebrate the welfare and rights of all animals. Dr Clement is not averse to treating any animal that comes through his doors. On the contrary, he observes how well these animals are treated and surprised at how much they are able to understand their owners.

BEING CAUTIOUS

Elizabeth John, senior communications officer at Traffic Southeast Asia, a wildlife trade monitoring network, isn't as enthusiastic about people keeping wild animals as a pet and advises caution. She also makes the point that there are wild animals you can legally keep and ones which it is illegal to do so.

There are also some practical reasons to consider. For one, it is expensive to care for such wild animals properly. After all, a python like Enigma isn't going to feel full on a plate of kibbles every day; and it's unlikely that anyone sells kibbles for snakes. My friend would have had to find live animals for Enigma to eat regularly had the reptile been found.

Also, these wild animals carry diseases that can be dangerous to humans.

And, by far the most tragic of all is that because of man's greed, many of these exotic creatures have been driven close to extinction or become extinct altogether. One of the few examples of wild animals that 43-year-old Elizabeth says we should never even consider keeping as a pet is the Indian Star Tortoise.

This animal is now found only in small pockets of India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan. Then there's the Ploughshare Tortoise which is now the rarest land tortoise on earth. Like the Radiated Tortoise, the

family **PULSE** BROUGHT TO YOU BY LIFE & TIMES



Dr Clement Anthony (second from left) and the python he treated.

Ploughshare Tortoise also exists only in Madagascar. International commercial trade in these animals is prohibited.

Another animal closer to home that you are not supposed to keep as a pet is the Malayan Sun Bear. Many times, says Elizabeth, the authorities find young bears that have either been caught from the wild, bought on the black market or are being kept without a licence. The tragedy here is that, often the mother bear is killed for the sole purpose of capturing these young bears. These animals can grow to 1.4m in height and weigh 60kg. Pet owners are clueless about how to care for these bears and the bears end up being chained or caged which will,

naturally, make them aggressive or difficult to handle.

THE LAW

If you are determined to legally possess a wild animal, Elizabeth suggests that you first consider the law that is applicable to where you live. If you live in Peninsular Malaysia and Labuan, you should look at the Wildlife Conservation Act 2010. In Sabah, it would be Wildlife Conservation Enactment 1997 and in Sarawak, it would be the Wildlife Protection Ordinance 1998.

Take otters, for instance. They are totally protected in Peninsular Malaysia, but only protected in Sabah and Sarawak.

“Recently, the Wildlife Department has made it a requirement that exotic pets be microchipped.”

Dr Clement Anthony

Over 900 birds are totally protected in Peninsular Malaysia, but not in Sabah.

Generally, animals that are totally protected may not be kept as pets, hunted, captured, killed, sold, etc.

You will need the proper licence to keep as pets, hunt, kill, etc those animals that are protected.

Also, to check if an exotic animal can be a health concern or suitable for a home environment, Elizabeth suggests a website called Eco Healthy Pets. She says: “This site may not list all the species you are looking for but it is a start.” If all else fail, you can always ask your vet.

Whatever the animal, companion or wild, Dr Clement insists: “We humans must learn to love and care for animals.”

To illustrate his point, he tells the story of a terrapin he treated recently. Its hind leg had become infected and gangrenous. Rather than let it suffer a miserable death, the owner was determined that Dr Clement should do all he could to save this terrapin. He agreed to let Dr Clement amputate a third of the terrapin’s leg.

“This was three years ago,” says Dr Clement. “Today, that terrapin is still around and both owner and animal are happy.”

To emphasise his point that we must understand that animals have the same rights as us, Dr Clement concludes by quoting Mahatma Gandhi: “The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated.”

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T W I N S

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