

WWF Indonesia supports sustainable merit release in Central Kalimantan



In 2025, WWF was invited by a representative of the Ministry of Religious Affairs from the Buddhist community in Central Kalimantan to discuss sustainable merit release.

The representative, charged with supporting Buddhist institutions, councils, organisations, Sunday schools, teachers, temples and communities, asked WWF to help them understand which species could be released in what locations, so as not to disturb the natural balance of the ecosystem.

Merit release is the act of releasing living beings, usually animals, back into their natural habitat or into the wild as an expression of compassion. It is a practice of loving-kindness aimed at saving living beings that are trapped or threatened so that they may return to live freely in their original habitat.

WWF discussed with the Buddhist community how the location for releasing animals must match the original habitat of the animals being released, and to avoid situations where the released animals die because they are unable to adapt.

It is also recommended to avoid areas that are easily accessible from residential areas, in order to reduce the risk of the animals' disturbing residents or being captured again. It is also important to avoid repeatedly releasing the same species in the same place within a short period of time, as this could lead to a population boom in that area.

WWF recommends that if you are unsure about what kind of location is suitable for performing merit release, to consult with environmental experts and organisations involved in nature conservation.

After the consultation with WWF, one temple performed a merit release ceremony in which they released 35 kg of fish, as well as birds.

Before the release, practitioners chant prayers – paritta, sutras, or mantras – dedicated to the happiness and wellbeing of all sentient beings, following their respective traditions (Mahayana, Theravāda, or Tantrayāna). The act of release is said to be done with a joyful and peaceful heart. It is not only a gesture of physical liberation but also a symbolic practice of letting go of internal attachments – such as emotions, desires, and ego – thus moving toward true peace and happiness.



Monks prepare to release fish