

From Cage to Consumer



*The global trade in bear parts from
China to Asia and beyond*

WSPA

World Society for the Protection of Animals



Executive Summary



Bear bile has been used in Traditional Medicine for thousands of years and is believed by some to have a number of therapeutic properties. Demand for bear bile is currently met through poaching of wild bears and extraction of bile from live captive bears, a process known as bear farming.

The international trade in bear species and products from bears is regulated by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). All eight species of bear are listed on the Appendices of CITES with five of the species being listed on Appendix I, which prohibits all international commercial trade. Although captive bred animals on Appendix I of CITES can be traded

under license, no bear farms are currently registered with CITES and so all commercial trade from bear farms is prohibited.

Between March and November 2006, the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) conducted an undercover survey of the illegal trade of bear bile products in the USA, Canada, Taiwan, Japan, Singapore, Korea, Australia and New Zealand. Bear products were illegally offered for sale in all countries investigated, with many stores claiming they originated from China. Many of the bear products found on sale were clearly labeled as being from China and in particular its bear farms.

Bear bile was offered at prices ranging from US\$3 to US\$48 per gram depending on the country. Many shop owners stated that wild bear products were of much higher quality than farmed bile and so were more expensive. This lends support to the argument that farming bears does not protect wild bears as the two products are not substitutable and so demand for wild bear products persists.

The number of shops offering bear bile for sale has decreased in some countries when compared with previous similar surveys. Possible reasons for this are discussed but it should be noted that this does not necessarily indicate an actual decrease in trade.

The bear farming industry in China is giving rise to a substantial amount of international illegal trade and measures put in place to stop the illegal export of bear products out of China are clearly not working. The WSPA therefore urges the Chinese government to reconsider its position on bear farming and instigate a phase-out of the bear farming industry in China.

SUMMARY OF SURVEY FINDINGS

Country	% of stores surveyed where bear bile products could be purchased	% of those stores where products originated from China
USA	15%	75%
Canada	14%	85%
Japan	75%	25%
Taiwan	42%	51%
Korea	33%	45%
Singapore	22%	72%
Australia	4%	0%
New Zealand	9%	0%

Introduction



Bear Bile

Bear bile and gall has been used in Traditional Medicine for thousands of years. Within the tenets of Traditional Medicine it is classed as a 'cold' and 'bitter' ingredient and is believed to have a number of therapeutic properties including, reducing inflammation and swelling, treating liver and eye conditions and reducing pain in cases of trauma.

Some have argued that bear bile is an essential ingredient in many Traditional Medicine formulae and that it cannot be replaced. However, this has been countered by many Traditional Medicine practitioners and academics in China and beyond, who have stated that there are many other herbs that have the same properties as bear bile and are equally effective¹.

Furthermore, a synthetic version of Ursodeoxycholic Acid (UDCA), the bile acid believed to be the primary active ingredient in bear bile, is widely available under a variety of brand names².

CITES and Bear Trade

The international trade in bear species is regulated by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). CITES is an international agreement between governments aimed at closely monitoring and controlling international trade in endangered plants and

animals. Animal and plant species are listed on three Appendices (I, II, or III) depending on the level of threat posed to them by international trade.

All eight species of bear are listed on the Appendices of CITES with five of the species being listed on Appendix I, which prohibits all international commercial trade in these animals or in products from them. These are the giant panda, Asiatic black bear, Malayan sun bear, sloth bear, spectacled bear and brown bear (populations in China, Bhutan, Mongolia and Mexico).

Ongoing Illegal Bear Trade

The illegal trade in bear parts has been well documented over recent years with a number of seizures of illegally traded wildlife including bear products^{3,4,5,6}. This illegal trade in bear parts is believed to be one of the major threats to the survival of bear species around the world⁷.

In 2002 WSPA released the findings of a major study into the illegal bear trade. Based on national surveys in 2001 in Australia, Canada, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan and the USA; *'The Bear Bile Business'* showed that the illegal trade in bears was widespread – illegal trade was found in every country surveyed. Furthermore, the survey showed that much of the bear products found on sale originated from bear farms in China^{8,9,10,11,12,13}.

Bear Farming and Illegal trade

Bear farming first started in China in the early 1980's using techniques developed in North Korea. It was believed that by meeting the demand for bear bile, bear farming would negate the need to kill wild bears thereby reducing pressures on wild bear populations. However, to date there is no evidence to suggest that bear farming has had any beneficial effects on wild bear populations in China or anywhere else¹⁴.

Bear farming continues and is legal in China and the Republic of Korea where there are reported to be 7000 and 1400 captive bears respectively. Bear farming is illegal in Vietnam but continues with around 4000 bears thought to be kept on farms. However, recognizing the negative effects of bear farming on wild bear populations, the Vietnamese government has recently stated its commitment to ending bear farming in the long term and is taking active steps to ensure the industry is stopped.

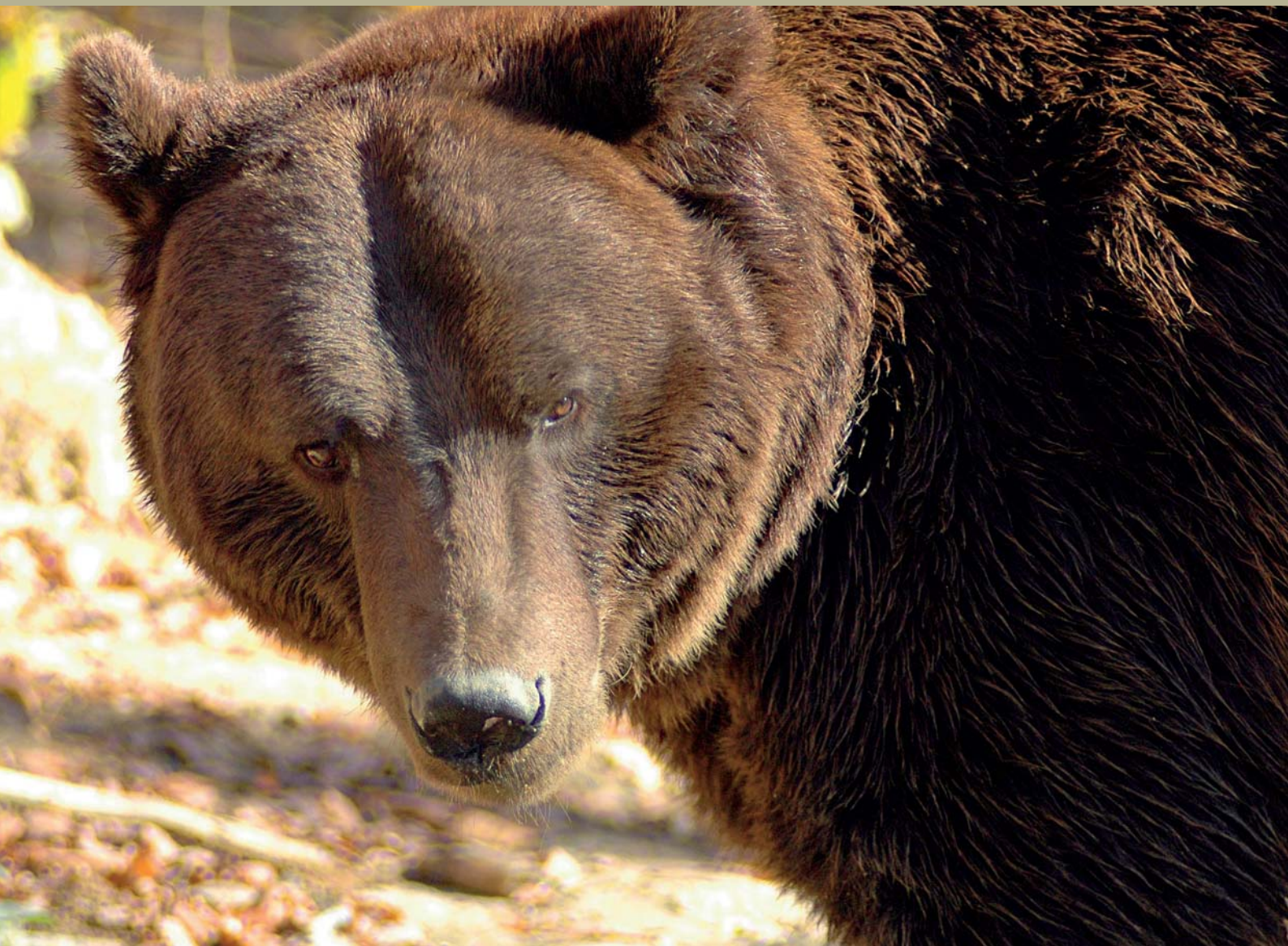
The animal welfare concerns associated with bear farming have been reported widely. It would not be overstating the case to say that in terms of duration and severity of suffering, bear farming is unmatched. The close confinement of bears over many years coupled with the regular extraction of bile through an open wound lead to severe psychological and physical suffering that cannot be overcome^{15, 16}.

Furthermore, government figures on domestic consumption

of bear bile indicate that bear farming has done more than simply meet existing demand. Prior to bear farming, domestic annual consumption of bear bile in China was around 500 kilos. In 1999 the CITES Management Authority of China stated that consumption of bear bile had risen to 4000 kilos and that production of bear bile had reached 7000 kilos. This represents a huge increase in consumption of bear bile in China and has led to what should be a large surplus. Our surveys indicate that a sizeable proportion of this surplus is being exported illegally.

International commercial trade from bear farms is illegal. All bears held on bear farms in China are listed on Appendix I. Under CITES regulations, captive bred Appendix I species can be treated as if they are on Appendix II thereby allowing international commercial trade. However, to do so the captive breeding facility in question must be registered with the CITES Secretariat. A number of criteria must be met if a captive breeding facility is to be registered including that the facility in question must be run in a humane, non-cruel manner.

There are no bear farms currently registered with CITES and so all international trade originating from bear farms is illegal.



The Scope of this Report



The Scope of this Report

This report will present the findings of an updated survey on illegal bear trade conducted throughout 2006. The surveys were carried out in Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Taiwan and the USA. The report focuses in particular on what proportion of illegal trade in bear products globally is reported to originate from China and its bear farms. Information presented in the report will include:

- The current legislation in each country relevant to bear trade.
- The number of instances where illegal bear products were found on sale in each country.
- Where indicated, whether the bear product originated from China.
- The price range for bear products found on sale during the survey.



Methodology

Between March and November 2006, the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) conducted an undercover survey of the illegal trade of bear bile products in the USA, Canada, Taiwan, Japan, Singapore, Korea, Australia and New Zealand. Surveys in Korea and Singapore were conducted by Green Korea United and Animal Concerns Research & Education Society respectively, all other surveys were conducted by WSPA.

Cities visited in each country:

USA: Los Angeles, San Francisco, Portland, Seattle, Chicago, Boston, New York, Washington DC.

Canada: Winnipeg, Edmonton, Calgary, Vancouver, Toronto, Montreal.

Taiwan: Taichung, Tainan, Taipei.

Korea: Seoul.

Singapore: country-wide survey.

Australia: Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane

New Zealand: Auckland.

Japan: Tokyo, Osaka, Kobe

For each shop surveyed information was collected using the following:

- Still photographs of the shops surveyed.
- Still photographs of bear products found on sale.
- Video recording, with full sound, of all discussions had with shop owners.

For each shop visited the following main questions were asked where possible:

1. Do you have any bear bile products?
2. How much do they cost?
3. Where are they from?
4. Is this farmed bear bile or wild? What's the difference between the two?

A bear bile product list was compiled for each country visited with prices and the names of manufacturers included where possible (See Appendix 1). Still photographs of ingredient lists were taken where possible.

