

PRESS RELEASE

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THE TRADE IN BEAR GALL BLADDER AND BILE PRODUCTS IN SINGAPORE

SINGAPORE, 6 Dec - A 3-month investigation by the Animal Concerns Research and Education Society (ACRES), in collaboration with the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA), has revealed that 73.5% of the 68 Traditional Chinese Medicine shops visited sell alleged bear gall bladder and bile products.

The study, which was conducted from May to July 2001, was sparked off after WSPA's investigation into China's bear farms in 1999-2000 where WSPA learnt from bear farms that they were illegally exporting bear bile products into countries including Singapore.

The most common products found during the ACRES investigation were alleged bear bile pills, followed by intact gall bladders. Bear bile crystals, powder, ointment and claws were also found. Most were not openly displayed or within direct access by consumers.

Of the shops selling bear products, 30% mentioned that the trade was illegal or that bears were protected species and 24% claimed that the trade was legal. Some shopkeepers advised researchers on how to travel with bear products, undetected by Customs.

There was evidence of a well-developed local import and distribution system. Some shopkeepers imported the products themselves.

At least 13 shopkeepers reported that they have a regular supply of bear products. 48% of shops selling bear products claimed to have a regular supply of customers or those who bought in bulk.

The most common customers were reported to be Chinese from Singapore and China. Taxi-drivers who bought bear bile pills to reduce "heatiness" were specially mentioned at least twice. Koreans were also cited as popular customers.

Trading in endangered species without necessary permits is illegal in Singapore, which is a Party to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Asian species of bears cannot be commercially traded; CITES permits are only given under special circumstances. Most shopkeepers reported that China was the main exporter of these products. Other countries included Indonesia, Malaysia, India and Vietnam.

In the 1999-2000 investigation, WSPA found bears living in extremely poor conditions in the Chinese farms, suffering in squashed cages, given a poor diet and having bile extracted from openings in their abdominal area. The mortality rate during surgery to facilitate bile extraction was between 50 - 60 %. The surviving bears had to live in stress and distress for up to 15 years. When no longer productive, they were left to die or killed for their gall bladders or paws.

Paige Lee, Media Spokesperson of ACRES, says, "Killing or farming bears is inhumane. The illegal trade continues because of us, consumers. We have the power to change things now. Let's continue to use Chinese medicine - it is part of our culture - but let's buy herbal alternatives to products which cause such suffering."

Victor Watkins, Director of the Liberty Campaign at WSPA, says, "Based on our investigation into China's bear farms and scientific opinion from experts around the world, WSPA calls for an end to bear farming."

Singapore must be congratulated in its plans to become a world-class TCM centre. Incorporating animal welfare into these plans would only enhance Singapore's standing as a TCM centre internationally."

Chen Yu-Min, Office Manager of the Environment and Animal Society of Taiwan (EAST), who is in Singapore to lend support to the campaign, says, "We want to commend Singapore on its achievements such as leading East Asia in becoming the first country to ban wild animals from circuses. This shows how progressive you are as a nation. With awareness programmes such as the ones the Animal Concerns Research and Education Society are going to embark on, we believe the consumers here will make positive choices and help end the trade in bear bile products."

ACRES is Singapore's new not-for-profit society aimed at fostering respect and compassion for all animals. WSPA is the world's largest network of animal protection specialists having a membership of over 400 animal protection societies in 91 countries. It has 13 offices worldwide and over 400,000 individual supporters. It has consultative status at the United Nations and the Council of Europe.