

Bear Markets: North America (USA and Canada)

A summary of the findings of: *'From Cage to Consumer: An investigation into the illegal sale of Chinese bear bile and bear gall products in North America'* published by WSPA, November 2000.

Author: **Hsieh Yi**

Contributors: **Cindy Chen, Pat Tohill, Silia Smith, Karen Schenkel**

In Autumn 2000 a total of seven cities in North America were surveyed – Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, San Francisco, Chicago, Washington DC and New York. Sixty-five TCM (Traditional Chinese Medicine) shops were examined – thirty-three in Canada and thirty-two in the USA. In the USA, one city in each of the three main geographical regions of the country was selected. In Canada, each of the cities selected has a distinctive Chinatown area and new Asian community shopping malls.

Summary of findings

Bear gall bladder/bile available in North America can be divided into three categories: manufactured bile medicines; farmed bile powder; and intact bear gall bladders. In total, 49 of 65 shops sold manufactured bile medicines; 6 shops sold bear bile powder and capsules; and 8 shops offered 17 intact galls. In summary, 51 out of 65 TCM shops surveyed in North America (78%) were found to sell bear gall bladder or bile products.

Farmed bear bile powder, extracted from live bears in Chinese bear farms was found in both the USA and Canada. For details of conditions on Chinese bear farms see page 28. More bile powder products were found in the USA than in Canada. All these shops confirmed that there would be no difficulty in purchasing more products in future. Seventeen intact gall bladders were found in five cities – Toronto, San Francisco, Chicago, Washington DC and New York. Each shop had at least one gall bladder and the largest number was five gall bladders in one shop. Galls were smuggled from China and Russia into the country, or from wild bears in Canada. One TCM shop in San Francisco emphasised that the galls were from wild bears in China. Also, galls from Alaska could be provided, if a customer placed an order.

WSPA investigator examining a box of bear bile pills offered for sale in a Chicago shop.



Intact bear galls are sold for the highest price. Farmed bear bile powder is the next most expensive product, followed by manufactured bile products, which are the cheapest products available. 53 (82%) shops recognised that the sale of bear bile products is prohibited in their state or province, although bear bile products were found in 51 of the 65 shops (78%) in this survey.

Legislation on bear trade in North America

Bear protection legislation in the USA varies from state to state. A total of 34 states prohibit trade in bear viscera, but 3 states prohibit the bear parts trade with exceptions. A total of 8 states allow trade in bear viscera if the bear has been killed outside the states' jurisdiction. Another 6 states allow trade in bear viscera. The two remaining states, Illinois and Hawaii do not have regulations regarding the trade in bear parts (see Table 1).

The federal law, the Bear Protection Act, would end the USA's participation in bear viscera commerce by prohibiting the import, export and interstate trade in bear gall bladders. Despite the fact that the majority of states currently prohibit the trade in bear parts, poaching continues to thrive because of the inconsistency of the laws from state to state. The Act intends to solve the current illegal trade across the different states and provide greater protection for wild bears in North America. Unfortunately, although the Act has been introduced to the USA Congress since 1996, it has still not been passed.

Table 1: Legislation on bear trade between states

<p>Bear Trade: A legislative 'patchwork' of USA state laws</p> <p>Prohibiting Sale:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 34 states prohibit the sale of gall-bladders within their jurisdiction <p>3 states including New Hampshire, Ohio & South Dakota prohibit trade but with exceptions</p> <p>Allowing Sale:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 14 states allow sale of gall /parts <p>8 states allow the sale of bear viscera if the bear has been legally killed outside the states' jurisdiction; 6 states including Idaho, Maine, New York, Vermont, Wyoming & Kansas allow the sale of galls/parts</p> <p>No Regulations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 2 states including Illinois and Hawaii have no regulations on the trade in bear parts <p style="text-align: right;"><small>Source: HSUS & AWI</small></p>

In Canada, the trade in wildlife products is considered a provincial matter rather than a federal matter, with no federal laws forbidding the sale and possession of bear parts. Most provinces allow the sale of bear parts, but ban the sale of gall bladders except for Nova Scotia and the Northwest Territories. In Ontario and British Columbia, it is specifically prohibited to possess gall bladders separated from bear carcasses. This year, Quebec has banned the sale and possession of bear parts and the province also banned hunting bears with dogs.

Table 2 shows the legislation on the trade in bear galls and bile products in the states and provinces, investigated by WSPA.

Table 2: The state and provincial legislation on trade in bear gall/bile products in North America, studied by WSPA

	USA	California	Illinois	Washington	New York
Legislation on bear galls/bile products	No federal law	Prohibited	No law	Prohibited	Legal
	Canada	Ontario	Quebec	British Columbia	
Legislation on bear galls/bile products	No federal law	Prohibited	Prohibited	Prohibited	

International legislation on bear trade - implementation of CITES

International trade in the eight species of bears found in the world today, is controlled by legislation implemented by the 159 member countries (Parties) to CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora). All eight species are listed on the Appendices of CITES. Five species (giant panda, Malayan sun bear, sloth bear, spectacled bear, Asiatic black bear) are listed on Appendix I of CITES, along with brown bear populations in China, Bhutan, Mongolia, and Mexico). Other populations of the brown bear, the American black bear and the polar bear are listed on Appendix II.

International trade in the species listed on Appendix I is very tightly controlled. In order for Appendix I bears, bear parts or bear derivatives to be traded internationally, for commercial purposes, the bears would need to have originated from a captive breeding facility that is registered with the CITES Secretariat in Switzerland (this trade would also require appropriate permits). Currently, there is no such facility registered with the CITES Secretariat. Therefore, any Chinese bear parts or derivatives, that are found in North America, would have been illegally exported from China and illegally imported into North America. This is a very clear and serious contravention of CITES.

General information

WSPA’s survey found that the bear gall bladder/bile trade in North America can be divided into three categories: manufactured bile medicines, farmed bile powder, and intact bear gall bladders.

Table 3: Type of trade of bear parts and products

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Manufactured bile medicines These types of medicines contain bear bile that is mixed with other Chinese herbal medicines. Also, deer musk is the most common ingredient to mix with the bile products. The medicines are produced in various forms including oils, pills, and plasters. The products are used for rheumatism, hemorrhoid, and sprains. All products are produced in China.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Farmed bear bile powder Produced and packaged directly from bear farms in China. In general the product is in the form of flakes and packaged in small vials.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Intact bear gall bladders Smuggled from China, Russia, or hunted by local hunters in other provinces or states in North America.

In Canada, manufactured bile medicines were found in 22 shops, farmed bear bile powder in 2 shops and galls were sold in 3 shops. In the USA, 27 shops sold manufactured bile medicines, 4 shops sold bear bile powder and capsules and 5 shops offered intact galls. In total, 49 of the 65 shops sold manufactured bile medicines, 6 shops sold bear bile powder and capsules, and 8 shops offered 17 intact galls. In summary, 51 TCM shops out of the 65 surveyed in North America (78%) were found to sell bear gall bladder or bile products (see table 4).

Table 4: Bear products found in the survey

Type of products	CANADA		USA		TOTAL	
	Shops number	% selling	Shops number	% selling	Shops number	% selling
Manufactured bile medicines	22	67%	27	84%	49	75%
Farmed bile powder	2	6%	4	12.5%	7	9%
Intact galls	3	9%	5	15.6%	8	12%
All bear products	22	67%	29	91%	51	78%

Total number of shops surveyed: Canada (33) USA (32)

Manufactured bile products are commonly sold in all the cities that WSPA investigated. However, the types of products in Canada are more diverse than in the USA. A total of ten different products were found and these included: ointment, plaster, wax egg, oil and pills (see table 5, product numbers 1-10). In Canada most of the manufactured bile products were openly displayed and accessible to customers. In the USA products were openly displayed on shelves but customers would need to ask to examine products. There were more shops selling manufactured bile products in Canada than in the USA.

Farmed bear bile powder was found in both countries (see table 5, product numbers 11-17). The bile is extracted from live bears that are kept on farms in China. These bears suffer severe cruelty in appalling animal welfare conditions. More bile powder products were found in the USA than in Canada. All these shops confirmed that there would be no problem to purchase more products in future. In San Francisco, one shop sold a bear bile powder product, which was labelled as containing bile produced by the bear farms in the Heilongjiang Province. Products are distributed by the most prestigious Chinese medicine, pharmaceutical company in Beijing. The company – Tung Zen Tan has its own clinics worldwide and is the major export company for Chinese medicines in China. This company is involved in the large scale trade of Chinese medicines to North America and Europe. It is disturbing to find it associated with the illegal international trade of farmed bear products.

Four bear bile products came directly from the bear farms, and one is labelled with a pharmaceutical company in Guangtung Province, which does not own a bear farm. Product 16 is from a wildlife research centre in Fu Kien Province. It also showed that bears are seen as a farm animal for making profit wherever they are kept, and their bile can be extracted for sale. This type of “wildlife research centre” commonly uses research and academic reasons as an excuse for keeping bears legitimately.



One of the more common bear bile products on the market, these 'Revival' pills were found in every city during the WSPA investigation.

They operate on the bears for bile extraction (see page 39). A similar wildlife research centre in the Sichuan Province, which also sold bear bile powder, was found during the WSPA Chinese bear farming investigation in 2000.

Seventeen intact gall bladders were found in five cities – Toronto, San Francisco, Chicago, Washington, and New York. Each shop had at least one gall bladder and the largest amount was five gall bladders in one shop. Although the shops prefer to sell an “intact” gall, two shops in Toronto and one shop in San Francisco were also willing to scrape part of the galls for sale.

In Canada, two bear gall bladders were from bears hunted from the wild in the Alberta Province, but the species were unknown. Two polar bears' gall bladders were found in two different shops. One was imported from Russia and the other was from Canada according to the shopkeepers. Bear galls were found in eight shops and seven of the eight shops confirmed that there would be no problem in obtaining more gall bladders and products in future.

In the USA three shops claimed their bear gall bladders were from China and one of these shops emphasised that galls were from wild bears not farmed bears. The other two shops did not want to tell the investigators more about the origins of the galls. When the shops were asked why they obtain the galls from China and not the USA, one shop claimed it was due to the USA legislation and that it was easier to kill bears in China than America. American bear gall bladders could also be provided but it would take longer to arrange. They may come from Alaska. One TCM shop in Chicago told WSPA investigators that dealers would bring the USA galls, which were obtained from illegal poaching, to their shop. Each gall would be sold by these dealers for around US\$100-200. In general the shop would not buy galls from these dealers because the shops did not trust them.

Table 5: Bear products and parts found in the survey

	Title	Type	Manufacture	Price	Area found
1	Fel Ursi Haemorrhoids Ointment	Ointment	Chung Lien Drug Works, Hankow, Hu Bei Province, China	US\$2 – 4.00	Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, San Francisco, Chicago, New York
2	Chui Fong Tou Ku Kao	Plaster	Kwangchow Pharmaceutical Industrial Corp	US\$.50-1.00	Toronto, Vancouver
3	Tieh Ta Wan	Wax egg	The United Pharmaceutical Manufactory, Kwanchow, China	US\$.90-2.00	Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, San Francisco, Chicago
4.1	Mao She Xiang San Xiong Dan Super Rheumatic Oil	Oil	Kwangchow Pharmaceutical Industrial Corp	US\$1.10-2.00	Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, San Francisco
4.2	Super Rheumatic Oil	Oil	China National Chemicals Import & Export Corp., Kwangtung Branch	US\$1.10-2.00	Vancouver
5	Moschus Fel Ursi "Chufeng T'oukuwan"	Bile pill	China National Medicine & Health Products Import & Export Corp. Guang Xi Wu Chow Branch	US\$2.60	Toronto
6	Diedayawang (Mao She Xiang, San Siog Dan Preparation)	Revival Pill For sprain	Produced under the supervision of the United Pharmaceutical Manufactory, Kwangchow, China	US\$3-4.00	Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, San Francisco, Chicago
7	Concentrated Powerful Fungelin	Hemorrhoid Pills	Produced under the supervision of the Poshan First Pharmaceutical Factory Guangdong China	US\$1.30	Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver
8	Fungelin For Piles, Yang Cheng Brand	Hemorrhoid Pill	The United Pharmaceutical Manufactory, Kwangchow, China	US\$1.30-2.00	Vancouver, San Francisco, Chicago
9	Fungelin For Piles (High Strength); Yang Cheng Brand New package. It does not list Fel Ursi in the ingredients	Hemorrhoid Pills	The United Pharmaceutical Manufactory, Kwangchow, China	US\$2.30-4.00	Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, San Francisco, Chicago, Washington D.C., New York

10	Musk Xiong Dan Hemorrhoid Pills	Pills	China National Native Product & Animal By Products; IMP. & EXP. Corporation Fokien Branch Chuanchow Office	US\$5.5/bottle	San Francisco; Chicago
11	Bear Bile (No English Text)	Bile Crystal Powder	Kwangchow Pharmaceutical Industry Co. Kwangchow, China	US\$48/bottle (US\$24/gram)	Toronto
12	Min Yoo Shan - Xiang Dan Feng	Bile Crystal Powder	Yinn Bian Bear Farm, Chin Lin Province	US\$40/bottle (US\$8/gram)	Toronto
13	Xion Dan Fen	Bile Crystal Powder	Produced by Bear Farm of Mudanjiang	US\$50/bottle	San Francisco
		(Bear Bile)	Hei Bao Medicine Group, Heilangjiang Province; Distributed by Beijing Tung Zen Dang		
14	Jin Tian Tai Bear Gall Powder	Bile Crystal Powder	Tien Hu Deer & Bear Farm, Guangdong Province, China	US\$15/bottle (US\$7/gram)	San Francisco
15	Xion Dan Feng	Bile Crystal Powder	Produced by Bear Farm of Mudanjiang Hei Bao Medicine Group, Heilangjiang Province	US\$38/bottle (US\$7.6/gram)	Chicago
16	Bear Bile	Bile Crystal Powder	Shiao Wu Wildlife Research Centre, Fu Kien Province, China	US\$150/bottle	New York
17	Xion Dan Giao Nan	Capsules	Hei Bao Bear Farm	US\$16/bottle (US\$7.5/gram)	Chicago
18	Two bear galls	Intact gall	From wild bear in Alberta, Canada	US\$560-650/gall	Toronto
19	Bear gall	Intact gall	Polar bear's gall from Canada	US\$12/gram US\$360/gall	Toronto
20	Bear gall	Gall cut in piece	Polar bear's gall from Russia	US\$160-250/gall	Toronto
21	Two bear galls	Intact gall	From wild bear in Chin Lin Province, China	US\$129/gall	San Francisco
22	Two bear galls	Intact galls	From Sichuan Province	US\$108/gall	San Francisco
23	Five bear galls	Intact galls	From China, but the galls were sold by a Company in New York and distributed them in Chicago	US\$50/each	Chicago
24	Two bear gall	Intact gall	Origin unknown	US\$350/each	Washington D.C.
25	Bear gall	Intact gall	Origin unknown	Unknown	New York

Remarks:

(1) Items 4.1 & 4.2 are products that share the same name – Super Rheumatic Oil. On product 4.2 the words “bear bile” and “deer musk” were eliminated. Also this product does not list bear bile in its ingredients but its packaging shows a picture of a bear and deer.

(2) With reference to item 9, its ingredient ‘Fel Ursi’ has been eliminated from the product description, but this product shares exactly the same brand name – Yang Chang Brand – and is produced by the same company as item 8, which has listed Fel Ursi in its ingredients. Also, item 9 is listed in the CITES Traditional Asian Medicines Identification Manual for Law Enforcers in the UK and it is prohibited to import or sell it in the UK. For these reasons item 9 is included in the list.

(3) The product Pien Tze Huang Yin Dan Ping Gan Capsule was recommend by some shops, because it contained bear bile. But some shops claimed it only contained snake gall. Therefore, the product is not included in the list.

Price of products

Bear galls from wild bears have the highest price in the bear trade. In the survey the highest price was US\$650/per gall in Toronto and the lowest price was US\$50/per gall in Chicago. Farmed bear bile is less valuable and sold for a lower price than whole galls. The survey found the price range for farmed bile to be between US\$24-\$7.6 per gram in North America. The retail price of farmed bile in the pharmacies in China is around US\$3.5/per gram and the price direct from bear farms is US\$0.24/per gram.

Manufactured bile products are the cheapest in the three categories. The price is not more than US\$5.5 dollar per item and the cheapest price is US\$0.50 for a package of bile plasters. The reason why these products are sold at such a low price could be because the percentage of bear bile as an ingredient is very small. Also, the bear bile is sold from the bear farms to pharmaceutical companies, which produce the manufactured bile medicines. These companies are able to obtain the best price from the bear farms.

One shop in Toronto quoted a different price for Chinese farmed bile powder, to the investigators. When they revisited the shop two days later the price had doubled for the same product. Additionally, the price of intact galls varied greatly between shops. This shows that the prices of the bear galls and bile products is arbitrarily set by the TCM shops due to the illegal trade and the underground market.

Table 6: The price of bile and products in North America & China

	Highest Price	Lowest Price	Price in China
Manufactured bile medicines	US\$5.5 for a bottle of pills	US\$0.50 for a package of plasters	Not available
Farmed bile powder (Per gram)	US\$24/per gram	US\$7.6/per gram	US\$ 3.5–6(in pharmacy) US\$0.24 (from bear farms)
Intact galls (Per gall)	US\$650/per gall	US\$50/per gall	US\$30-50/per gall (in pharmacy)

Recognition of illegal trade by TCM shops

When the TCM shops were asked whether they sold bear gall or bile products, in 53 shops (81.5%) either the shop owners or shopkeepers told investigators that the sale of bear parts and products was prohibited, and the sale would violate the law. Thirteen shops mentioned that the sale would cause the shop owners to be fined or jailed, or the shops may be shut down. Seven shops said this was due to the protection of bears in North America.



Vancouver, Canada:

One of the least expensive bear bile products, the plasters in this box sell for between 50 cents and a dollar. This product is used to treat spasms.

Because of the recognition of illegal trade and penalties, 5 shops did not want to provide bile products straight away, especially for the sale of galls or pure bile powder. After ensuring the investigators were buyers or after consulting with the senior shop person the galls or farmed powder would be offered. The decision to sell the products tends to be decided by the senior clerk or owner, because of the risk of violating the law.

Although 53 shops recognise the sale of bear parts and products is illegal in North America, bear bile products were sold in 51 of 65 shops in the WSPA survey. Some shops emphasised that they would not sell the farmed bear bile powder and bear galls, but the manufactured bile products, which contained bear bile as one of the ingredients, were openly displayed in their shops. When investigators questioned the shopkeepers about this contradiction, various answers were provided:

- a. The manufactured bile products are easier to smuggle into the country.
- b. The percentage of bile contained in the products is very little.
- c. The products do not contain bear bile even though bile has been listed as an ingredient in the product description
- d. The products displayed in the shop are old stock. They would not have any more left after selling them.

After studying the bile products' descriptions and packages, in the English text the word "bile" has been replaced by the direct translation of the Chinese pronunciation, such as "Xiong Dan" or "Siong Dan". For example one farmed bear bile powder product was found in San Francisco and its name

listed on the package was “Xion Dan Fen” which means bear bile powder. In contrast the words “bear bile” were still printed in the Chinese text in the products description and package, so Chinese customers could still recognise these as bile products. This may be the reason why manufactured bile products are so commonly sold and displayed in North America.

The routes of importation from China into North America

Manufactured Chinese medicines, farmed bear bile powder and intact bear gall bladders from China are imported into the consuming countries by various methods.

Illegal importation by local TCM importers

In Canada, the manufactured Chinese medicines, such as ointments, rheumatic oil and revival pills which contain bear bile are commonly and openly sold in the TCM shops. The products are displayed on the shelves and are easily accessible to customers, although a few shops do try to hide bear bile manufactured medicines behind the counter. In the USA, the manufactured Chinese medicines are also openly sold in the shops but the variety of products is less than in Canada.

The similarity of the products and the high percentage of sales of manufactured bile products, in 49 shops, show that these types of manufactured medicines could be illegally imported from China, by the local importers, in huge quantities in order for the products to be distributed to the different shops.

Illegally imported by shop owners & individuals

In general, farmed bear bile powder which is produced in the bear farms, and intact bear gall bladders, are imported by the shop owners or individuals when they visited China. Although these quantities may not be huge the shops can obtain the products on a regular basis (and as the subsequent market reports in this section will show, this smuggling is multiplied many times across the globe). When investigators asked whether they could purchase more bile powder or galls in future, the shops selling the products all confirmed that there would not be a problem.

Three shops suggested the investigators should purchase the bear bile powder direct from China, and ask for it to be sent by mail. The shops claimed there would be less risk of it being confiscated as long as “bear bile” is not listed on the product. For instance, the words on the sticker could be crossed out or the whole sticker could be taken off.

The power of enforcement - undercover investigation

Several shops told the investigators that there was enforcement by the authorities and the enforcement officers would inspect the shops irregularly, so they could not sell bear gall and bile products. Especially in Vancouver, the shopkeepers told the investigators that police posed as buyers with Asian or Chinese officers to inspect the shops. The operations have been successful, resulting in the seizure of 191 gall bladders, and the prosecution of nine individuals for wildlife trafficking and possession⁴.

To date, police enforcement to regulate the trade has had an effective influence on the TCM shops in Vancouver. During the WSPA investigation, no bear gall or Chinese bile powder was found in Vancouver, although the manufactured bile medicines were still openly sold in the shops. Shops were also concerned when people asked for bear galls and bile. As one shop in San Francisco stated:



WSPA investigator examines a bottle of bear bile offered for sale in a San Francisco shop.

“Even if the shop did have some bile products, neither I nor other shopkeepers would sell it anyway, because we wouldn’t know if you were actually government agents.”

Obviously the law enforcement, in particular the use of undercover techniques, has had an effective result on the trade of bear parts. Agents posing as buyers or sellers can help to eliminate the illegal trade and break down the network’s activities.

Bear farms are causing a bear conservation crisis

Bear farms in China continuously claim that the production of bile from farmed bears will reduce the demand of wild bear galls and that it would prevent the killing of bears. In fact these claims are false. Firstly there is no precise scientific information on wild bear populations in China and there is no data to show any increase in bear populations to support the claim. Secondly, WSPA’s findings show that bear galls from China are illegally smuggled into the USA. Three shops told WSPA investigators the bear galls, sold in the shops, came from China. One shop emphasised that the galls were from wild caught bears. The survey indicated that the sale of bile from bear farms in China would not decrease the demand for bear galls from the wild. It will only stimulate the trade and the illegal poaching.

Intact galls from wild bears are considered to be more effective than farmed bear bile and this belief is commonly acknowledged and accepted among many Asian people. They believe that the farmed bile is of less value, medicinally and financially, than galls from wild bears. So no matter how much farmed bile is available on the market, the galls from wild bears are always more sought after. Therefore, people who can afford to pay for the wild bear galls will not purchase farmed bile powder. Moreover, to ensure that the galls are genuinely from wild bears it is often considered necessary to witness the killing of the bears.



Left: Produced by Kwangchow Pharmaceutical Industry Co. in China, this small vial of farmed bear bile powder sells for US\$48.
Right: A bear on a Chinese farm, bile is seeping from an open wound into the bowl below the cage.

Another potential problem with excessive production of farmed bile is that it makes bear bile more available in the market place. The promotion of the use of farmed bile stimulates and speeds up the demand for bear galls, so it could entice more consumers to purchase bear galls.

Interviews with undercover investigators, who were involved in the trade of bear parts and rhino horn in Asian countries confirmed that richer people would always want to obtain the galls from wild bears and did not want to buy farmed bile since galls from the wild are more powerful and effective for the treatment of illness.

Increased illegal bear poaching and the trade in North America

A number of conservation groups and bear specialists have expressed their concerns that the trade of farmed bile products from China would not eliminate the threat of bear poaching in China, but would boost the trade of bear parts worldwide. It would also increase the demand for bear galls globally and affect the bear populations in North America and other regions. Bears in North America are poached for their galls and sold to dealers or individuals who sell them across states and provinces, and even onto the international market.

In early 2000, WSPA's report on Chinese bear farming stated, "Not only does the Chinese bear farming industry stimulate the poaching of bears in China, but it also threatens wild bear populations globally". WSPA's survey in the USA and Canada has shown that the use of bear gall and bile products in Chinese medicine has caused poachers to look to bears in North America to meet the demands of the bear parts market.



A shopkeeper in a Markham store weighs and then crushes a bear gall bladder he claimed was from a Canadian bear.

In Canada, three shops in Toronto offered to sell bear gall bladders to the investigators. Two of the three shop owners claimed the bears were poached in Canada. The other claimed that the bear gall bladder was exported from Russia years ago. One shop told the investigator the gall was from a wild caught polar bear and was called “Golden-silk polar bear gall”. One shop said he did not keep the intact bear gall bladders in the shop. If the investigators paid a deposit, the gall bladder could be collected the next day in the shop.

In the USA investigators asked a shop in Chicago if there were any US bear galls available; the store owner said yes. One shop owner told the investigators she had been offered some before but she did not want to risk buying them. She told the investigators that there were people who secretly killed bears and tried to sell the galls to her but she was afraid to buy them as she didn’t know these people and she didn’t want any trouble. The investigator asked if these people offered her many bear galls & she said no, just a few for about US\$100-200. The store owner said that the person who offered her the bear galls came around to her store periodically.

During the investigation in two shops, the Chinese practitioners said the sale of Chinese bile products could cause the poaching of wild bears in Canada, because the bear galls from Canada or China could not be visibly differentiated in the shops.

It is clear that the demands of the Chinese traditional medicine market for bear gall and other bear products has caused poachers to look to American black bears, brown bears and polar bears to meet the demands of the bear parts market.

The use of alternatives and educational awareness

In WSPA's survey, three shops claimed the trade of bear galls and bile was prohibited, so they recommended herbal medicines as alternatives. The number of shops that recommended alternatives remained low, but the result is still positive and encouraging. It shows that through legislation, education and media coverage some TCM shops have received the message and gradually they are changing their attitude.

The awareness of the use of alternative medicine will take a long time to see an actual change but the message will get through eventually. For instance research published in 1997 by the Department of Health in Taiwan showed that between 1992-93 the percentage of use of bear bile by Chinese practitioners was 23% and between 1994-95 the percentage was reduced to 4.6%. Also for the TCM shops the percentage between 1992-93 was 38.7% and between 1994-5 it was reduced to 3%. According to the research, the reasons for the reduction in use were due to media coverage through international exposure and law enforcement⁵. In addition, the education programme in Vancouver has helped the TCM shops to recognise the illegal trade in bear bile products. Also, posters/stickers produced by NGOs have been posted in TCM shops in San Francisco.

However, the educational materials and activities for TCM shops, in various Chinatowns in North America, need to be developed and held regularly. Messages detailing the use of alternative products, the legislation on bear trade and the list of illegal product items should be included in educational programmes. Meanwhile, regular meetings and communications with the Asian communities' leaders or TCM associations are needed. Public education is also a key point to focus on with residents of Asian communities in North America.

Conclusion

Bear bile and TCM products containing bear gall/bile derivatives produced in China are being illegally imported into Canada and the USA. These products, which are manufactured from bile and gall produced in Chinese bear farms are readily available to consumers in Western countries and are openly sold in Chinese medicine shops.

Bear farming promotes the increased use of bile products. Chinese bear farming and the marketing and commercial sale of bile will therefore also increase the demand for the slaughter of wild bears for their galls. This trade is having a detrimental impact on wild bear populations throughout Asia to North America.

Vast amounts of bear bile products are exported from China to North America. The Chinese government continually promise that they are determined to enforce the CITES convention and stop the illegal trade from China. In order to achieve this, the Chinese CITES Management Authority and the Customs authorities need to take more action enforcing CITES regulations by having stricter control and by carrying out more inspections to prevent the illegal export of bear bile products out of China.

Effective and regular inspection of TCM shops in North America should be continued and greater law enforcement should be conducted. Undercover investigation techniques should be utilised by official agents in order to prevent the illegal trade and seize these products. In particular, Chinese speaking investigators should be used in order to identify relevant products on display.

Public awareness campaigns and media support highlighting the illegal trade of bear bile products have had an impact on the issue to some extent. Also, a high percentage of TCM shops recognise the legislation banning the bear bile/gall trade in North America. Long-term public awareness programmes should be developed.



One of eight bear galls offered to WSPA investigators during the course of this investigation, this time at a store in San Francisco's Chinatown.

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is the main tool for regulating the international trade on bear species, especially Appendix I species. The ban on the international trade of Chinese bear bile products should remain. The bear farms in China should not be legally registered under the CITES convention, either through the CITES Secretariat in the central registration system or through the Chinese CITES Management Authority. The key reasons for this are: the detrimental effect on wild populations; animal welfare concerns in the bear farms; and the existence of synthetic and herbal alternatives to bear products.

Currently bear protection legislation varies state by state in the USA. The disparity between state laws allows a loophole through which a prosperous bear viscera trade has grown. This loophole can be addressed if the Bear Protection Act is passed. In addition, the consumption of Chinese bear bile products also stimulates the demand of bear viscera in the USA and Canada, this threatens bear populations not only in North America but globally.

The pain and suffering of the bears in farms in China is not visible when these bear bile products are displayed in the TCM shops. The killing is not witnessed when the bear galls are sold. Bears are tortured for their bile and killed for their galls by humans who are making enormous profits through this trade.

The suffering of bears in farms in China will continue as long as there is a market for their products. This WSPA investigation has proven that part of that market is gained from consumers in North America.

The links in the trade from China to North America have to be broken.

We all have a responsibility to stop the suffering and the killing of bears for their body parts and products.

Action needed

- The USA must pass the Bear Protection Act to close the loopholes which currently facilitate an illegal bear part trade in North America.
- Stronger enforcement of existing legislation is needed to prevent the illegal sale of bear products in North America.
- More training is needed for customs and law enforcement officers to identify illegal bear products.
- More effective education programmes on this issue are required for relevant Asian communities in North America.
- Awareness programmes are needed to highlight the cruelty involved in the production of Chinese farmed bear products.
- International protests should be made to the Chinese Government over the cruel practice of bear farming and the illegal international trade in their products.
- Bear farming should not be legitimised by allowing China to legally trade in their farmed bear products.
- CITES must continue to prevent the sale of Chinese farmed bear products.
- More effort must be made to change attitudes towards the use of herbal and synthetic alternatives to bear gall and bile.

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