

## REPORTS AND COMMENTS

### The bear bile industry

Last year, the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) commissioned two investigations into the bear bile industry. According to official figures, more than 7000 bears are kept in Chinese bile farms (Fan & Song 1997). Bear bile is extracted from the gall bladders of live bears via cannulation in the ventral abdomen for use in traditional Chinese medicine and human health supplements.

In the first study, Dr Barbara Maas was appointed to carry out an investigation into the veterinary, behavioural and welfare implications of bear farming in Asia. Information was obtained from two independent surveys of 44 Asian bear bile farms. The report examines acute and long-term stress effects on bear health and welfare.

Dr Maas found that the management policy and housing and husbandry conditions provided for adult and juvenile bears in the bear farms studied were unsuitable for several reasons. She reported that the space, size and internal structure of the caging were inappropriate and that behavioural abnormalities such as stereotypies, excessive inactivity and self-mutilation commonly occurred on all farms. Her work also revealed poor breeding rates throughout the industry, and most of the farms visited openly admitted supplementing their captive populations with wild caught bears. It was shown that many farms assessed during the investigation had no veterinary support; others only employed technicians and, frequently, surgery was not carried out by experts or under sterile conditions. In addition, bears showed clear signs of poor health as a direct result of surgery-related health problems; they also suffered from a variety of ailments including sores, deleterious skin conditions, ectoparasites, hair loss, bone deformities, injuries, swollen limbs, dental and breathing problems, diarrhoea and scarring. The report concludes that bear farming for bile extraction is incompatible with modern husbandry standards, which are designed to ensure the physical and mental health of animals. For this reason, WSPA recommends that bear farming should be abandoned.

Hsieh Yi was commissioned to compile a report of the results of the second project, an investigation into the illegal trade of bear bile and gall products in North America. The report, *From Cage to Consumer*, demonstrates that a variety of products labelled as containing bear bile or gall are being openly sold in the nine cities that were investigated in Canada and the United States of America. A number of recommendations are made. Among these are: that the CITES Management Authorities and Customs Agents need to introduce tighter controls if the international trade is to be stopped; that stronger enforcement of existing legislation is needed to prevent the illegal sale of bear gall bladders within North America; and that public awareness campaigns are required to highlight the illegal trade in bear products and the poor welfare standards experienced by animals on these bear farms.

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**Fan Z and Song Y** 1997 Bear present status and conservation, and bear farms in china. In: Williamson D F and Gaski A L (eds) *Trade of Bear Parts* pp 5-19. Proceedings of the Second International Symposium.

*The Veterinary, Behavioural and Welfare Implications of Bear Farming in Asia* (2000). Maas B. Published by WSPA. 73 pp. Paperback. Available from WSPA Headquarters, 89 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7TP. Price £10 voluntary donation.

*From Cage to Consumer: An Investigation into the Illegal Sale of Chinese Bear Bile and Bear Gall Products in North America* (2000). Yi H. Published by WSPA. 45 pp. Paperback. Available from WSPA Headquarters, 89 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7TP, or, for North American orders, from WSPA, 34 Deloss Street, Framingham, MA 01702, USA or WSPA, 44 Victoria Street, Suite 1310, Toronto, Ontario M5C 1Y2, Canada. Price: free of charge.