

Chinese scientists call for ban on bear farming

April 26 2012, by Bob Yirka

(Phys.org) -- Three Chinese scientists, Xia Sheng, Haolin Zhang and Qiang Weng, all from Beijing Forest University, have published a correspondence paper in the science journal *Nature*, calling for a ban on the practice of bear farming in China. Bear farming in that country is done to allow for the extraction of bile from the live animals to be used in traditional Chinese medicines (TCMs).

The trio make it clear that they are not against TCM, but insist that more humane ways must be found to obtain ingredients for them. They say that extraction of bile, from [bile ducts](#) in living [bears](#) is painful and results in [liver cancer](#) in as many as 30% of the bears kept for their bile.

Other groups such as [Animal Asia](#) say that living conditions for the bears is inhumane, pointing out that they are kept in small cages and have their teeth removed. Most develop [cataracts](#), they say, and don't live very long.

The public appears to side with the animal rights activists, as reports of a public outcry have been heard around the country following the application by Guizhentang, a pharmaceutical company that runs several bear farms, to go public to allow it to add more farms. The company claims to have developed a method of extraction that is not painful.

In their paper, the scientists say that there are alternatives to collecting bile from live bears such as finding substitutes or creating a lab version of it. But purists in China insist on the real thing and are willing to pay for it, and thus, the practice of bear farming goes on as it has for 3,000

years. The group is calling for the Chinese government to ban the practice of bear farming and to outlaw inhumane treatment of animals, particularly those kept for the purpose of providing ingredients for TCM.

Currently as many as 10,000 Asian black bears (known in China as moon bears) are held in bear farms across the country, which has no laws protecting animals, though the sale of bear bile is specifically allowed. Asian black bears are an endangered species.

Thus far, there has apparently been no reply to the [correspondence](#) paper from the National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the body that has the authority to ban the practice of bear farming.

More information: Traditional Chinese medicine: China's bear farms prompt public outcry, *Nature* 484, 455 (26 April 2012)
[doi:10.1038/484455c](https://doi.org/10.1038/484455c)

Abstract

Some 10,000 bears are farmed in China to procure their bile for traditional Chinese medicine. This cruel practice has stimulated a wave of condemnation across the country.

Bile is repeatedly collected from live bears through a surgically introduced opening into the bile duct, a procedure that is painful and distressing to the animals (see www.animalsasia.org). Some pharmaceutical companies use a variation of this technique that they say does not hurt the bears.

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