

Black market for python skins worth \$1 bn a year

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Nearly 500,000 skins are shipped on the [black market](#) from southeast

Asia every year to grace the windows of Europe's fashion houses, particularly in France, Germany and Spain, a report by the Python Conservation Partnership found.

The rising demand from major brands like Calvin Klein and Jimmy Choo, which use the exotic patterned skin to make handbags, shoes and jackets, is depleting wild populations of the giant snake.

Instead, the report said commercial [python](#) farming, previously deemed unviable as the snakes take too long to mature and are difficult to feed and breed in captivity, could be the answer.

"This report offers a possible alternative solution to the sourcing of python skins for which demand is escalating," said Jean-Christophe Vie, a senior executive at the International Union for Conservation of Nature, which backed the study.

"However, there is still some way to go towards more transparent, better managed python farming."

The study is the first published by the Python Conservation Partnership, which is backed by the owner of luxury fashion house Gucci, Kering, and the IUCN.

Pythons are already farmed commercially in China and Thailand and some in Vietnam, according to the report.

But in Indonesia and Malaysia, the top suppliers of Asia's [reticulated python](#) and the Burmese python, the snakes are still caught in the wild as they have been for almost eight decades.

Even skins that claim to be from farms in Laos, Cambodia, Indonesia and Malaysia should be "treated with caution" as laundering of python

hides is so widespread in these countries, the study found.

The report recommended using specialist techniques such as DNA or isotope testing to help identify whether a skin is really farmed or taken from the wild.

Marie-Claire Daveu, chief sustainability officer at Kering, said such changes would help fashion houses "to enhance traceable, sustainable sourcing" and so move the "industry towards more informed decisions in python sourcing".

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