

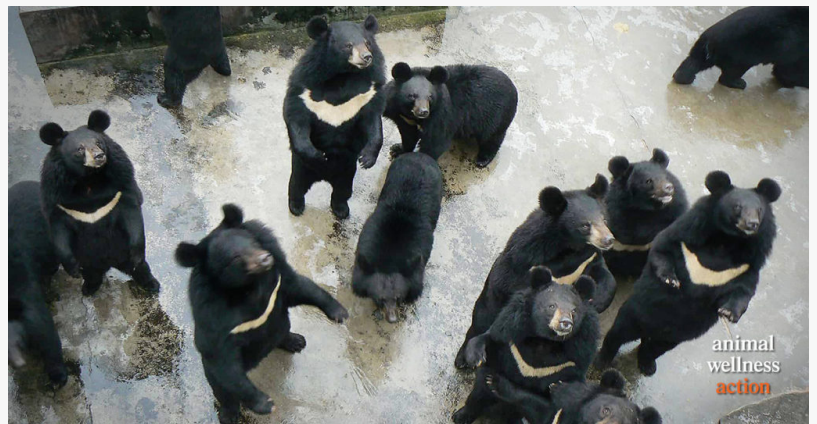
Bears, “Milked” And Killed For The Bile, Are One Of The Least-Known Victims Of COVID-19 Pandemic

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- [By Wayne Pacelle](#)

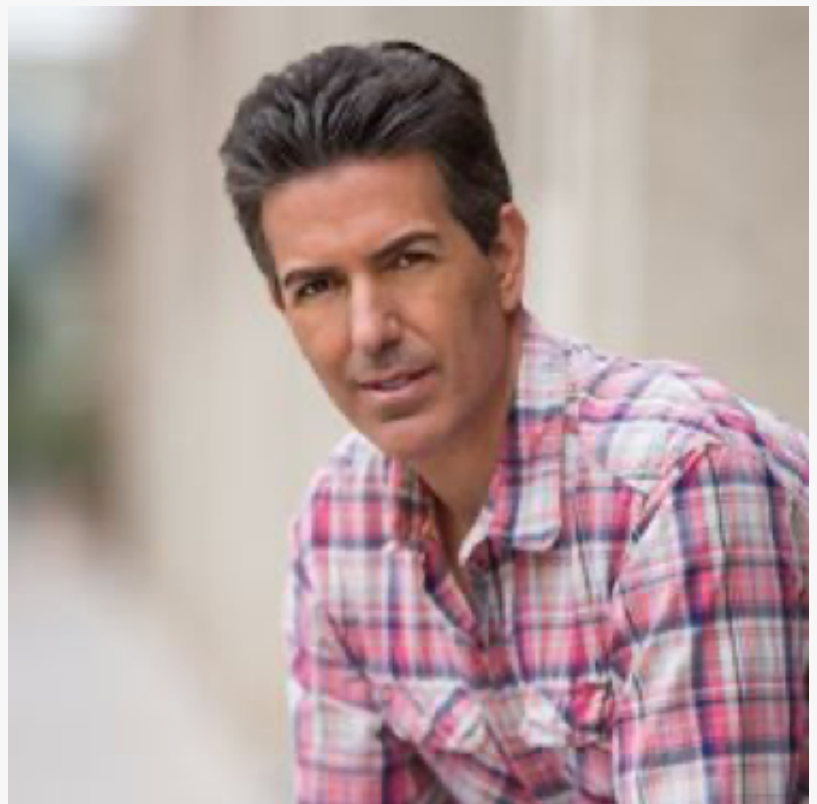
Survey the world in search of the worst localized horrors meted out against animals — the animal sacrifices of the Gadhimai Festival in Nepal every five years, the fish-in-a-barrel shooting of captive lions in South Africa, the water-borne butchering of pilot whales in a Faroe Islands inlet, the midnight slaughtering of two million kangaroos a year in their native habitats in Australia for their skins to make athletic shoes. Even with all such barbarities in mind, you could make a case for bear bile farms, an organ-extraction industry centered in China and Vietnam, as the very worst.

It's hard to believe that this enterprise, with so medieval a feel, had its origins in the 1980s. The practice has been in decline — down in number by perhaps two-thirds from its high point — but still reportedly draining the lifeblood out of 10,000 bears kept as captives.

The hapless victims, Asiatic black bears — endangered in the wild and known as ‘moon bears’ for a bright patch of fur often in the shape of a crescent on their upper chests — are trapped in the wild and relegated to modern-day dungeons. Displaying the scars of capture delivered by snare or bullet, they are held behind concrete and steel for one purpose: harvesting the bile stored in their gall bladders.



Bear Farm



Wayne Pacelle

According to Animals Asia, the stellar advocacy group that secured an agreement from Vietnam to phase out its bear farms and that has tried to achieve the same result in China, the customary practice is to jam a catheter through their skin and into the gall bladder, where the bile is stored.

It is inhumane, unhygienic, and debilitating, causing lesions, infections, and other life-threatening conditions. They endure serial, invasive extractions. "Some bears are even fitted with 'metal jackets,'" according to Animals Asia, "designed to keep bile-draining catheters in place."

In a knock-you-off-your-feet tremor of the COVID-19 crisis, some Chinese government officials are suggesting that a treatment of Tan Re Qing — with the main ingredient being bear bile — be used as a palliative for the symptoms of the virus. "If one abomination could yield an antidote for the consequences of another," writes Matthew Scully in a just-published essay in National Review, Tan Re Qing would surely be just the thing to treat a virus loosed in the pathogenic filth and blood-spilling of Wuhan's live market. There's actually a synthetic alternative to the bile acids, but Tradition can be everything in these matters, and devotees insist that the substance must come from a bear, even as real medical science rates the whole concoction at somewhere between needless and worthless."

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While Asiatic bears absorb the brunt of the effects of the trade, other bears don't get away unscathed either. There are eight species of bears in the world, and every one of them is at risk from this trade, since their gall bladders and bile are indistinguishable. Wildlife traffickers are known to take gall bladders from American black bears, grizzly bears, polar bears, or other bear species that are scarce across their range. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service busts of poaching rings — perhaps sniffing out one of every 100 — are a testament to the reach of the global trade.

In some cases, at bear-check stations where hunters bring in just-shot bears for weighing and tooth extraction, wildlife traders hang around the margins and offer cash for gall bladders. While black bears are one of the few species of bears in the world that have been holding their own, there are imperiled subspecies — including the Florida black bear and the Louisiana black bear, both especially vulnerable to bouts of poaching.

That's just one reason why Senators John Kennedy, R-La., and Cory Booker, D-N.J., introduced the Bear Protection Act, S. 3196, just about the same time China's COVID-19 crisis was reaching its peak. "For years," said Kennedy, "legal loopholes have allowed the abuse and trade of wild bears to continue. I'm proud to partner with my friend Senator Booker to help prevent the slaughter and sale of innocent creatures through a commonsense solution."

A bipartisan group introduced the House version of the Bear Protection Act months prior. "Poaching has been driving the world's bear populations toward extinction and now is the time to take action," said lead author Ted Lieu, D-Calif., a Congressman of Chinese descent. His co-authors are Rodney Davis, R-Ill., Ann Kuster, D-N.H., and Glenn Thompson, R-Penn., who in his spare time has done surveys of bears in their dens in his vast northern Pennsylvania district.

Two decades ago, citing rampant poaching in Kentucky and throughout the United States, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell introduced identical legislation, noting that “bear gall bladders are worth more than their weight in gold, fetching a price of about \$10,000 a piece!” He said the bill was aimed at “the growing illegal trade in bear parts, in which at least 18 Asian countries are known to participate. The poaching of bears is a national problem that is destined to become worse.”

Well, worse is now. With climate change and human encroachment on their habitats making life ever more tenuous for wide-ranging species like bears, the last thing bears need is an upsurge in demand for their bile. In 2018, the United States passed a ban on the commercial sale of dogs and cats for their meat, signaling to China and other nations that it’s time to rid their nations of the custom, just as the U.S. did. (Just this week, China’s Ministry of Agriculture announced, in an enormously hopeful sign, that it was moving against the dog meat trade, reclassifying the animals as “pets.”)

That’s precisely why we need the Bear Protection Act, as a protective measure at home and a high-bar standard for the rest of the world to emulate. Demand for bile in China, South Korea, the United States, or other nations with an appetite for Traditional Chinese Medicine translates into exploitation of wild and captive bears. We shouldn’t kill bears for their gall bladders and harm them for their bile, just as we shouldn’t kill rhinos for their horns, elephants for their tusks, or sharks for their fins.

We’ve got to leave behind the whole set of archaic, inhumane practices where we treat wildlife as potluck or potion, as textiles or trinkets in the making. The COVID-19 crisis is an air-siren to be heard and heeded throughout the world, including for the protection of wildlife.

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