
China Bear Rescue – Questions you might have

What is bile?

Bile is acidic digestive fluid produced by the body to digest food. It is stored in the gall bladder.

What is bear bile used for?

The bile of bears is used in traditional Chinese medicine to treat heat-related illnesses such as high temperatures.

Can anything replace bear bile?

Chinese experts in traditional medicine have found that modern drugs, as well as alternative natural herbal treatments are effective in treating complaints where bile was traditionally used. Also, the active ingredient in bear bile can easily be synthesized in laboratories. There is no need for bears to be ‘farmed’ for their bile.

How is the bile removed from the bear?

In the 1980s, farms were set up in China to enable the extraction of bear bile. Moon Bears are immobilised in small cages and bile from their gall bladders is collected from a permanently open wound carved through the bear’s abdomen. Most of the bears live their whole lives trapped in a tiny cage, unable to move.

Is this practice legal?

Bear bile farming is currently legal in China, but the Government signed an agreement in 2000 with the bear welfare group, Animals Asia Foundation (AAF) to close some farms, place the bears into AAF’s sanctuary and eventually work towards phasing out bear bile farming. This program is not about public condemnation, it is about recognizing the important successes of the government of China in already transferring bears into a sanctuary and encouragement for the eventual cessation of bear bile farming in China.

What is the signature program about?

Zoos and aquariums in Australia and New Zealand have got together to try to raise awareness of this issue and see if our visitors would like to register their support to the phasing out bear bile farming in China. We’re trying to get one million signatures to deliver to Chinese authorities to encourage them to place the farmed bears into sanctuaries and end bile farming.

For more information:

www.animalsasia.org

Phone: 1800 666 004

www.arazpa.org.au

China Bear Rescue – Additional Information

Animals Asia Foundation

Animals Asia Foundation was established in 1993 after Australian businesswoman Jill Robinson MBE was taken for a tour of a bear farm whilst visiting China.

She saw Asian Black Bears (also known as Moon Bears because of the yellow crescent of fur splashed on their chests) incarcerated in tiny metal cages, with rusting metal catheters implanted in their abdomens through which bile was being extracted for use in traditional medicine. She later discovered that bear bile could be completely replaced by cheaper herbs and synthetics.

Ms Robinson established Animals Asia, working tirelessly in China, resolutely building relationships and negotiating with government departments to bring an end to this cruel practice.

Importantly, she worked with the Chinese authorities, rather than opposing them and was able to make vital progress over time.

In July 2000, Animals Asia signed a landmark agreement with the Chinese Authorities to rescue 500 suffering Moon Bears in Sichuan Province, to work towards the future elimination of bear farming in China and to promote the herbal alternatives to bear bile. This historic agreement was the first accord between the Chinese Government and any outside animal welfare organization.

The China Bear Rescue Is Underway

Since October 2000, more than 40 bear farms have been closed down by the Government and over 219 bears released into the care of Animals Asia at its Moon Bear Rescue Centre in Sichuan. The bears arrive in extremely poor condition - but with tender loving care and intensive veterinary attention the vast majority of them recover.

The rehabilitation of the bears takes many months. Sadly, they can never be released into the wild. Many are defenceless and disabled, bred in captivity or snared in the wild as cubs and do not have the necessary survival skills. Therefore, Animals Asia has constructed a permanent sanctuary, in the midst of a bamboo forest where these bears can live their lives free of pain and fear. The sanctuary and its accompanying Education Village are central to AAF's work of changing attitudes through education.

Bear Bile Farming

Moon Bears have been killed for their gall bladders for thousands of years, but it is only in the past 20 years that countries in Asia (such as Korea, China and Vietnam) began to search for an alternative to taking an animal from the wild and killing it for the sake of an 85 gram organ.

Bears are the only mammals to produce significant amounts of the bile acid - ursodeoxycholic acid (UDCA), which has been used in Traditional Medicine for approximately 3,000 years. Whilst studies have shown it to be effective, today Chinese doctors agree that it can easily be replaced by herbal and synthetic alternatives which are cheaper, more effective and more readily available.

Moon Bears have been most affected by the demand for bile acid. The International Union for Conservation of nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) lists the Asian Black Bear as vulnerable in the wild. They are also listed as Endangered under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).