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BEARS CRUSHED IN CAGES



Sichuan Province, China - 7 among 28 moon bears rescued from a Ziyang bile farm (crushed in cages to drain their bile) die. "Some were blind, flesh literally rotting to bones... out of their minds with fear... leaking bile, blood, pus," says Animals Asia Foundation founder Jill Robinson. 2000: AAF signs MOU with Sichuan officials to rescue 500 bears; by 2008 has access to only 247. 2006: European Parliament urges China to end bear farms by 2008; 7,000 bears still trapped. photo: AAF

by **Brenda Shoss**

He might have stood 6 feet tall, a 100 to 260 pound moon bear named for the gold crescent across his ebony chest. But this bear cannot rise or turn. His flat eyes gaze into nowhere.

Over two decades, the bear grows beyond the bounds of his cage. Friction wounds scar his face, paws and back. He gnaws iron bars until most of his teeth fall away. When cage crazy, he slams his head into the metal cell and chews his arms to the bone. Days turn to years. He waits for nothing, the sum of his existence on a bear bile farm in China.

His worth is measured in ursodeoxycholic acid (UDCA), a liquid generated from his 3-ounce gallbladder. For 3,000 years, Traditional Oriental Medicine has used bile acid to treat maladies from headaches, hemorrhoids, fevers, and bone fractures to heart and liver diseases, colon cancer, poor vision, kidney stones, and sexual dysfunction. The bear is one of 7,002 others warehoused on 247 farms, according to the government's last tally, 1999.

In the 1980s Chinese farmers borrowed a Korean process for milking bile from captive bears. Live extraction, also practiced in Vietnam but now illegal in Korea, was introduced to curtail the slaughter of wild bears. The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) lists the Asiatic Black Bear (moon bear) in Appendix 1, the most urgent class of endangerment.

By the 1990s, China emerged as the world's chief producer of farmed bile, with over 10,000 bears on 400 farms. Farmers with no veterinary skills mutilate the animals to speed extraction.

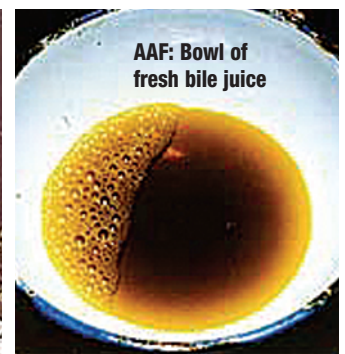
Latex catheter surgery, discarded in the mid-80s, gleaned bile from a rubber pipe affixed to the gallbladder. Through a hole in the bear's upper thigh, bile trickled down the pipe. Animals Asia Foundation (AAF), a Hong Kong based charity that leads the international movement to end bile farming, suspects bears rescued with these crude implants were caged for about 20 years.



2009, Vietnam - AAF urges Vietnamese government to seize 24 moon bears from illegal bile farming in Ha Long Bay Area. 2005: AAF signs MOU with officials to care for 200 bears at Vietnam Moon Bear Rescue Centre; but just 30 bears in 2009. photo: AAF



sfgate-
Jill Robinson
 Photo by
 Kathleen
 McLaughlin



AAF: Bowl of fresh bile juice



photo: Animals Asia
Jasper, free at last



AAF: Babies bred on big farms

The **full metal jacket** enveloped a bear's torso to keep him from dislodging a latex pipe catheterized into his gallbladder. Below the bear's belly, bile seeped into a fluid bag held in a metal box. Bears suffered infection, hair loss, and excruciating pain.

After the Chinese banned metal jackets in 1996, **metal catheters** up to 7.5 inches long were grafted into bears' gallbladders. To immobilize bears, farmers flattened them in "crush cages," often neglecting to lift the metal brackets when finished milking. Some bears stay smashed under rusted crushes for years.

On present day farms, bile dribbles from a permanent hole cut into the bear's abdomen. The **free-dripping** system, touted as more humane, is catheter-free. Yet farmers drive an unsanitary tube through a membrane over the hole, causing infection and bile leakage into the bear's abdomen. Despite a high death rate, modern farms annually output some 141,000 ounces of bear bile, the San Francisco Chronicle reported in *Freeing China's Caged Bile Bears*.

A single teaspoon of bile can net \$10, while intact gallbladders fetch \$18,000 on the black market. Chronicle reporter Kathleen E. McLaughlin says surplus bile has even outpaced consumer demand. "In response, drug companies have started using excess bile in alternative products like shampoo, wine and health teas." The World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) claims bear bile goods are for sale in most big U.S. cities.

China's Asiatic Black Bear numbers continue to drop, with less than 20,000 in the wild, based on 1999 figures from the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. As a result, all of the planet's eight bear species (except the giant panda) risk imperilment from criminal poaching throughout Asia, North America and South America. U.S. arrests for smuggling bear parts overseas illustrate the global depth of the problem.

If Jill Robinson has her way, the bile trade will end at its source. The British founder of Animals Asia Foundation wants China to terminate bear farming prior to the 2008 Beijing Olympics. One bear altered the course of Robinson's life. While touring a Chinese farm in 1993, she slipped into a dim cellar where she encountered motionless bears packed in cages. Their stomachs were impaled with grimy tubes and fluids splashed into bowls beneath them.

Suddenly, a lone paw stretched beyond the steel bars. Robinson, oblivious to the combative nature of moon bears, impulsively clasped the huge paw. "In years later, it has shaken me and made me really believe there was a message there," she told the San Francisco Chronicle.

The bear's gesture inspired Robinson to save others like him. In 2000 Animals Asia forged a pact with the China Wildlife Conservation Association, endorsed by Central Government in Beijing, to release 500 bears from squalid conditions on Sichuan Province farms. In the unprecedented agreement, Chinese officials vowed to phase-out bear farming.

To date, AAF's 25-acre Moon Bear Rescue Centre on the outskirts of Chengdu in Southwest China employs 70 people to rehabilitate 185 bears, with 100 more anticipated by September of 2005. Veterinary director Gail Cochrane prioritizes each arrival for surgery. "Along with having to remove the corroded seven-inch catheters, she [has] to clean agonizingly painful abscesses, remove pounds of fibrotic tissue, and repair abdominal hernias as large as soccer balls," writes Patricia L. Howard in *A New Phase for China's Moon Bears*.

Robinson's team has reason to hope. "Cruelty Doesn't Cure," a coalition of Traditional Chinese Medicine practitioners, now use herbal or synthetic alternatives in place of bear bile, tiger bone, rhinoceros horn, and other ingredients from endangered animals. Contemporary TCM practitioners maintain that 75 surrogates possess the active component in bear bile.

Still, tradition is a tenacious opponent. While the government has disbanded more than 30 farms and granted no new licenses since 1994, it is hard to forsake centuries of fixed belief. Robinson worries about snail-pace progress, with no law to officially close farms.

For now Robinson focuses on the Centre's residents, like undersized Franzi, only 50 pounds from malnutrition, and 7-foot Emma who weighs in at 300 pounds. She'd like to rescue 1,000 bears while she educates local communities and lobbies government departments. "We're moving ever closer to the end of this industry," Robinson stated in *China Daily's Moon Bear Heaven*. "Everyone here feels it — Westerners and Chinese alike."

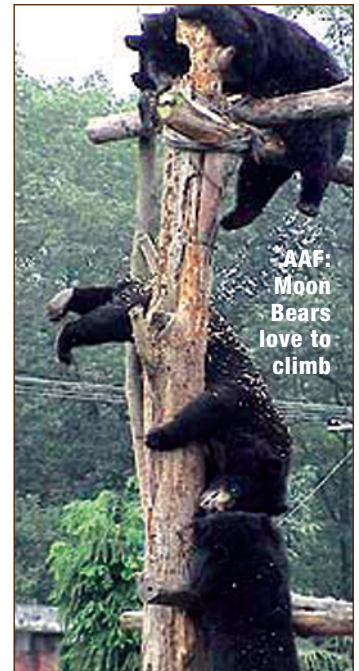


AAF founder Jill Robinson and bear

Bile Bottles: Kathleen McLaughlin, San Francisco Chronicle



AAF: 3-legged Andrew Moon Bear Rescue Centre www.animalsasia.org



AAF: Moon Bears love to climb

UPDATES

■ **April 2009: 284 bears rescued; 41 bile farms in China closed.** Under AAF's agreement with the Chinese government, farmers are compensated for confiscated bears and the entire farm is closed down. The farmer's license is taken away and handed to Animals Asia, along with rescued bears.

■ **2/6/09: 13 more moon bears rescued in China.** Sichuan Forestry Protection Department delivers them to AAF's Moon Bear Rescue Centre in Chengdu. Animals Asia now has over half the 500 rescued bears Chinese officials agreed to in 2000.

■ **2007: The first of 200 lucky bears arrive at AAF's new Hanoi sanctuary.** Animals Asia has worked in Vietnam on the bear farming issue for 8 years. As of 2005, the Vietnamese Government has agreed to phase out bear farming. On 11/16/05, AAF signed a formal agreement to rescue 200 farmed bears in Hanoi!

■ **1/15/06: 'Ending Bear Farming in China' now official E.U. Policy.** European Parliament sends resolution to Council of Ministers and European Commission, urging European Union to insist China end the cruel practice of bear bile farming. EU President sends a letter to China's President Hu Jintao stating the change in policy.

■ **2/9/06: Magnificent Andrew, AAF's first rescued Moon Bear, dies.** AAF workers nursed Andrew when he arrived in a pitiful state in 2000. Andrew died from liver cancer related to his brutal incarceration on a farm. Now his noble spirit lives on at the sanctuary in a sculpture that not only captures Andrew's physical likeness, but also his soul... Andrew was the most generous, forgiving bear, a gentle giant; he looked out for the younger bears and was always there to encourage the distressed new arrivals. He was so handsome we called him the Brad Pitt of the bear world...

SOURCE: AAF NEWS, www.animalsasia.org/index.php?UID=2JONI0GTVCA