

From tiger paws to bear testicles, the bizarre animal parts on sale in China's 'medicine markets' where the more endangered a species is, the more healing qualities it is believed to have

- Traditional Chinese Medicine claims to cure all sorts of ailments including back ache, poor memory and cancer
- Markets in Guangzhou stock exotic and rare animals destined for restaurant menus, pharmacists and pet cages
- But beliefs drive £13billion illegal wildlife network, the world's third-largest illicit trade behind arms and drugs
- Network of fledgling organisations are now challenging centuries of tradition in bid to change consumer appetites

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From bear testicles and tiger paws to crocodile jaws and snake heads, these are just some of the bizarre animal parts being sold in China's so-called medicine markets.

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) claims all manner of ailments including back ache, poor memory and even cancer can be cured by the natural world.

It is often believed that the more endangered the animal is, the greater the healing affect it will have.

Such wisdom is widespread in Guangzhou, where markets stock exotic and rare animals destined for restaurant menus, pharmacists and pet cages.

However, a movement of fledgling organizations such as the South China Nature Society, run by student conservationists, is challenging centuries of tradition by trying to change consumer appetites in the country.



Snapped up: Customers purchase a Crocodile Head at Hunagsha market. The head is commonly used in soups. In Traditional Chinese Medicine, it is believed that crocodile meat can treat lung illnesses and improve memory



Jaws-dropping: A selection of shark fins for sale at Haizu market. A single great white shark fin can fetch up to \$1,000 (£700)



Unappetising: A bear penis and testicles for sale at Qingping market. In Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), it is considered to be a potent aphrodisiac.



Sensitive issue: A tiger penis, which is considered to be a potent aphrodisiac, for sale at Qingping market



Brutal@ Crocodile farmers prepare to remove live organs from an illegally traded Vietnamese Crocodile. There are an estimated 6,000 illegally traded crocodiles in Guangzhou's 'legal' crocodile farms

China's appetite for endangered wildlife and the 2,000-year practice of Traditional Chinese Medicine is the main catalyst behind the world's third- largest illicit trade

Guangzhou is the richest and most powerful city in southern China, with a keen taste for exotic animals and plants, seen as extreme even in other regions of China.

The main reason for this is 2,000-year-old Traditional Chinese Medicine that lists curative qualities in thousands of rare and exotic animals, such as the Sumatran Tiger.



Barbaric: An illegally traded Vietnamese crocodile lays in a pool of blood, while Crocodile farmers remove live organs



Illicit trade: Crocodile farmers prepare illegally traded Vietnamese crocodiles for shipment to various markets and restaurants



A dozen crocodile tails at Huangsha restaurant. It is believed that Crocodile meat can treat lung illnesses and improve memory

The pursuit of these traditions is the driving force behind the \$20 billion (£13bn) illegal wildlife network, the world's third largest illicit trade, surpassed only by arms and drugs.

The network activity intensifies in South East Asia home to rich biodiversity, well developed transport infrastructures, high profit margins and lax law enforcement, a haven for wildlife smugglers.

Vietnamese authorities recently seized a record haul of smuggled wildlife including two tons of tiger bones, bear paws and gall bladders. The destination was China where Tiger bones can fetch up to \$70,000 (£50,000).

One may of thought that the rise of Guangzhou's economy and subsequent education would have reduced the consumption of endangered animals, but quite the opposite. Rising incomes have allowed more consumers to indulge in exotic foods once considered exclusive delicacies for the rich.

The consumption of these endangered animals have now become a symbol of Guangzhou's new wealth. A recent poll taken in Guangzhou found that half the population had eaten wildlife, with snake being named as the favorite of half of those surveyed.

A popular saying has it that people in Guangzhou will eat anything with four legs except a chair, anything that flies except a plane and anything in water except a boat.

The greatest defense of animal rights to date was during the SARS outbreak in 2003 when consumption dropped due to public fears about the risk of contracting SARS from wild animals.



An illegally traded cobra is killed and prepared in front of customers at the Panyu Restaurant



An illegally traded cobra is prepared in front of customers at the Water Snake Restaurant. The restaurant is a popular haunt for government officials when closing important business deals. Snake blood is considered an aphrodisiac and the meat good for vision and the lower spine



Dried snakes at Qingping market. In Traditional Chinese Medicine, snake meat is said to be good for vision and the lower spine

The demand for civet cats decreased so much that 141 farms released 4,000 of the animals into the wild. Bird flu later added to this concerns. In recent years, consumption has recovered. In the latest line of defense stands, the South China Nature Society (SCNS), a young band of four university graduate conservationists.

Established in February 2008 by Feng Minghe under the guidance of NGO - Green Eyes China, SCNS faces the mammoth task of challenging centuries of Chinese wisdom in an international hub of exotic wildlife trade. 'Our key objective is to raise awareness and educate consumers on the impact of their consumption. We hope that targeting the next generation will reduce future demand', explains Feng. Raising awareness and educating consumers takes a number of forms. The group organises various workshops and lectures in the local Guangzhou's universities. Each month, they co-ordinate field investigation among the city's live market and record the number of protected species.



A tiger farmer attempts to sell a Bengal tiger paw for \$3,000 (£2,000) in the Qingping area of Guangzhou. The global population of tigers has been reduced by 95 per cent as a result of hunting and poaching for their body parts, which are used in Traditional Chinese Medicine



A seller weighs a tiger claw for a customer. The global population of tigers has been reduced by 95 per cent as a result of hunting and poaching for their body parts, which are used in Traditional Chinese Medicine

Their findings are reported to the authorities and published on the SCNS and Green Eyes websites. On recent visits to the city's notorious live animal markets of Qingping and Huadiwan, SCNS identified a wealth of protected animals from koala bears to crocodiles to great white sharks.

Sun, a veteran snake seller at Qingping, said the market sell fewer protected species than before because many animals are near extinction and government checks are tighter. However, he did admit to selling endangered species 'under the table' including Cobra. 'The demand here is so great if I didn't sell it then someone else would, people will always buy,' he said.

The nearby Water Snake Restaurant, a popular haunt for government officials, illegally offer Cobra. 'It's 200 Yuan (£21) per kilo, we get it from the wild,' a waiter said.



A customer inspects an endangered Western-painted turtle at Qingping market. It is illegal to breed endangered turtles for commercial gain, however there are 600million turtles in farms throughout China. Turtle meat is believed to cure cancer



A red-eared slider turtle tries to escape from its net at Huangsha Market. It is believed that the turtle can confer wisdom, health and longevity



A sign advertising critically endangered big-headed turtles for sale. There are 99 species of turtles traded in Guangzhou alone. Turtles are used in a wide range of applications from pets and ornaments to food and medicine



Caged Iguanas shortly before being freed by members of South China Nature Society which is campaigning to stop the bizarre animal parts for sale in Chinese 'Medicine Markets'

In March, SCNS scored a major victory by protesting outside a Guangzhou restaurant in which was holding a nurse shark in a tiny tank in which it could barely move.

Banners reading 'no consuming, no killing' in English and Chinese, caught widespread media coverage from local news channels.

In the end, the shark was released to a local marine park.

Zheng Ying Yuan, from SCNS said: 'We are still a very young organisation but we are moving in the right direction. But, with 15 million people and 2,000 years of history real changes are going to take time.'