

Veg Vibe Magazine

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ACRES goes undercover impromptu to gather evidence against bear parts trader

Working on a tip-off received on their 24-hour hotline (97837782), a team of activists from the Animal Concerns Research and Education Society (ACRES) quickly scrambled to Hall 5 of the Singapore Expo in Changi to investigate an allegation of an exhibitor at the Singapore Food Expo selling bear gall bladders.

The Singapore Food Expo is an annual large-scale food event organised by the Singapore Food Manufacturers' Association (SFMA) and held in Singapore for the local Food & Beverage industry. Last year's event saw 154 exhibitors handle 612,000 visitors and this year's event is supported by the Health Promotion Board, Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority (AVA), People's Association, Spring Singapore and International Enterprise Singapore.

The ACRES team arrived at the scene by 5pm yesterday - within half an hour from receiving the tip-off, and immediately went undercover as interested buyers to approach the merchant and enquire further. The seller told the activists that the gall bladder, acquired from a bear, had been brought in from China and would cost S\$700. And while he claimed to have only one gall bladder left, having already sold off the rest, he revealed that more could be ordered and delivered to Singapore upon request.

All bears are protected species and the commercial trade in bear products is banned under the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), which Singapore is a party to. Thus, based on the incriminating evidence gathered by the undercover team, ACRES then notified the AVA, whose officers duly responded and seized the alleged bear gall bladder. The AVA is the CITES authority in Singapore that administers the Endangered Species (Import and Export) Act (ESA).

Previous ACRES undercover investigations have identified the presence of an illegal trade in bear products in Singapore, with 73.5% (2001) and 20% (2006) of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) shops offering alleged bear products. "This continued trade creates a demand for bear products and fuels the exploitation of bears held in bear farms. The practice of farming bears for their bile is inhumane on the grounds that it severely compromises the health of bears", says Ms Anbarasi Boopal, Director of ACRES Wildlife Crime Unit.

This trade is also detrimental to wild bear populations and if there is no action to eliminate such trade, poaching may cause the drastic decline of wild bears that could eventually lead to the extirpation of certain populations or even whole species.

The ESA lists all CITES species in its Schedules and deems it is an offence to import, export and re-export any CITES species without a permit from AVA. The possession, sale, offering or exposing or advertising for sale or displaying to the public of any illegally imported CITES specimen is also an offence with the penalties on conviction being a fine of \$50,000(per species)

and/or 2 years imprisonment.

In addition, the offence is still made out even if the products turn out to be not authentic as the claim that the product is sourced from bears potentially drives up the demand for bear products and directly contravenes the spirit of CITES.

Noting the invaluable contribution of the public's eyes and ears on the ground, Mr Louis Ng, Executive Director of ACRES thanked the caller in this case and reiterates, "The public plays a crucial role in wiping out the illegal wildlife trade. We urge the public to remain vigilant and keep a lookout for the sale of endangered species. ACRES is confident that with the community playing an active role, we can wipe out this illicit trade before it wipes out our wildlife."