



FACT SHEET

Wildlife Trade **Factsheet No.5**

When thinking of wildlife, one may quickly associate that with apes swinging over the tips of trees in a tropical jungle in Indonesia, or a group of roaming lions hunting prey in the African continent. However, wildlife and, more commonly, products made from wildlife are not that distance from us, but everywhere in the city. To some of us, it is part of our lives.

Timber trade

Ranging from beds and dining tables, from roof beams to surface finishing, wooden products and accessories are an essential component of our homes and indeed our societies. Power transmission poles, floors, decorations and most parts of a tram are made from wooden materials, or in other words, timber. Unsustainable timber harvesting cause deforestation, loss of topsoil, loss of habitats, displacement of indigenous inhabitants (both human and animals) and sometimes leads to extinction of some animals and plants.

Wildlife or seafood?

Most of us may have attended the wedding banquets of our beloved friends and relatives, in which shark fin soup, steamed reef fishes, abalone and occasionally *beche-de-mer*, or sea cucumber are often popular items on the menu.

In the last ten years, as much as 844,000 metric tonnes of abalone¹ and 5.3 million metric tonnes of dried sea cucumber² and another 11 metric tonnes per annum of shark fin³ were imported to Hong Kong, making Hong Kong the hub for the global trade of those commodities. Not all of those were consumed locally in Hong Kong, though. Some of which were re-exported to mainland China and Taiwan for their growing domestic markets.

A majority of the wild-sourced seafood products are legally acquired and traded, though it does not necessary mean the collection and harvest are ecologically sustainable. Most dried abalones, whether imported from South Africa or Australia, are collected from the wild, sometimes illegally from no-take zones and during no-take seasons. Only a few aquaculture operations are known to cultivate abalone.

Humphead wrasse (*Cheilinus undulates*) and Giant Grouper (*Epinephelus lanceolatus*), among other the reef fishes, are favorite delicacies among seafood lovers. As much as 6 400 tonnes of live reef fishes were imported to Hong Kong each year for food

¹ Dried and frozen abalone, excluding canned abalone.

² Nearly 80% of the reported imports of dried sea cucumber was first shipped to Hong Kong, then re-exported to elsewhere including the Mainland China.

³ Figures for the years 1998-2002. It is also known that Hong Kong handles at least 50-80% of the world trade in shark fin (Anon. 2003 *Shark Finning* IUCN Information Paper)



consumption. Wild populations of some of those reef fishes are known to be decreasing and reflected partly in the frequent availability of juvenile fish on the dining tables recently. It is reported that cyanide is sometimes used to stun the fish for easier capture.

Pet trade

Iguanas, Indian Star Tortoises, pythons, parrots, some tropical clownfishes, arowana are popular pet animals in Hong Kong. Some of them are not native to the local and regional ecology. Accidental, or intentional release of such exotic animals from captivity will lead to undesirable consequences. Numerous reptiles that are classified as endangered or vulnerable by scientists are found in pet shops in Hong Kong during a survey conducted in 1999.

Wild animals as food and tonic

Eating wild animals as food and tonic has long been a phenomenon in many provinces in China. Guangdong and the two Special Administrative Regions – Hong Kong and Macau, are however amplifying such appetites. Snakes are the most popular delicacy among Hong Kong people, followed by civet cats and pangolins⁴. Among the exotic dishes, the consumption of fresh water turtle and tortoises may reflect the scale of the food trade. The import of live tortoises in Hong Kong increases 33-fold in a ten-year period (1992 – 2001), of which a considerable portion is re-exported to China. Fresh water turtles and land tortoises are mostly consumed as food and as jelly-like black color “turtle tonic”. Other animals that are protected by the State are not unusually seen on the dining tables.

Drug store from the nature

Parts and derivatives of animals and plants have long been used in traditional medicine in the world. Traditional Chinese medicine is one of the health care provision in Hong Kong. Made from a combination of medicinal plants, herbal tea, or *liang cha*, is also a popular health tonic in Hong Kong. However, not everyone knows that Hong Kong is the leading importer of medicinal plants in the world. As much as 7,000 metric tonnes p.a. of medicinal plants were imported to Hong Kong during the ten year period from 1990-1999. Hong Kong retained about 4% of the total reported imports for local consumption and the majority of these imports were re-exported to Taiwan, South Korea, China, Japan and the USA.

Bear gall bladders, musk pod, pangolin scale, seahorse, wild-sourced American ginseng roots, are listed on the Appendix II of CITES, the Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora⁵ (SEE BELOW FOR MORE ABOUT CITES). Species listed on the Appendix I of CITES are not allowed to be traded while species listed on Appendix II can be traded under a permit issuing system. In Hong Kong, import, export, re-export and in some cases possession of CITES-listed specimens require permits issued by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation

⁴ Lee, S. K. H (1998) *Attitudes of Hong Kong Chinese towards wildlife conservation and the use of wildlife as medicine and food*, TRAFFIC East Asia, Hong Kong.

⁵ CITES Secretariat web site: www.cites.org



Department before proceeding. Failure to comply with the statutory requirement may result in severe legal consequences.

Part of our life

Wildlife also exist in other forms, such as leather products made from crocodile or ostrich; *er-wu*, a traditional Chinese musical instrument of which some part are made from python skins; edible bird-nests that are derivatives of certain swiftlet species (*Collocalia* spp.); live orchids; garments made from the wool of animals such as vicuna; and ornaments made from elephant ivory.

Given wildlife is important to the integrity of the ecosystem and an inseparable part of our lives, managing the exploitation of wildlife wisely has become significantly important. Sustainable use is therefore an important principle for the use of this resource.

Trade Regulation

International trade in wildlife is regulated by an international agreement, CITES⁶. CITES is implemented in Hong Kong through the enforcement of the Animals and Plants (Protection of Endangered Species) Ordinance since 1976. Most of the CITES-listed species are regulated under this Ordinance. Trade in Appendix I listed species is not allowed owing to the severe impact that trade places on their remaining wild populations, while trade in Appendix II species is allowed but subject to a permit issuing system for import, export and re-export control.

Hong Kong, a Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, maintains its own CITES permit-issuing system that is different from the Mainland China. Moving CITES-listed species between the two jurisdictions requires CITES permits.

Recommended readings and resources

Broad *et al* (2003) *The Nature and Extent of Legal and Illegal Trade in Wildlife*, in Oldfield (ed.) (2003) *The Trade in Wildlife*, Earthscan, Gateshead, U.K.

What is Wildlife Trade? from the following URL: www.traffic.org/25/wild.htm

TRAFFIC TRAFFIC, the wildlife trade monitoring network, works to ensure that trade in wild plants and animals is not a threat to the conservation of nature. It has offices covering most parts of the world and works in close cooperation with the Secretariat of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. Visit www.traffic.org for more information.

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⁶ As of 30 December 2003, there are 164 nations that are Signatory Parties to CITES.