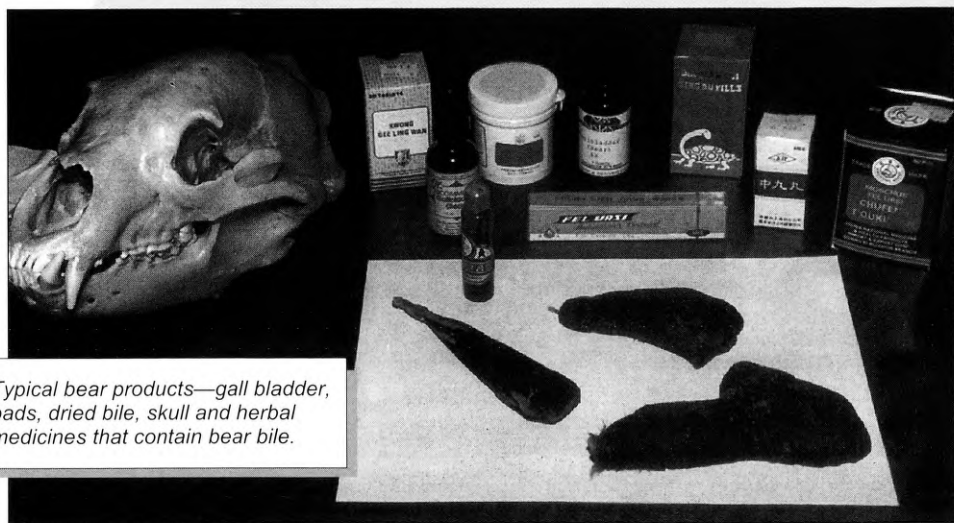


Black market in wildlife becoming lucrative business

The international wildlife trade is now the second biggest area of illegal activity in the world, surpassed only by drug trafficking—but just barely. Interpol has estimated dealings in wildlife exceed \$5 billion a year. As prices for wildlife—alive and for body parts—continue to rise, organised crime has begun to make inroads into this lucrative industry. This story by Constable Ken Chatel of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police was published in *Gazette*, the RCMP's equivalent of *Platypus* and illustrates succinctly the enormity of this growing criminal activity.



Typical bear products—gall bladder, pads, dried bile, skull and herbal medicines that contain bear bile.

"I have three dried, each 20 grams," said the undercover operator. "How much do you want?" inquired the target. "\$100 each," replied the operator. "Is it genuine?" queried the target. "Yes, and I have a video to prove it," answered the operator.

Is this a drug deal going down? Not this time. This is an illegal purchase of Black Bear gall bladders. The buyer is likely a person of Asian descent, with connections in Asia. The seller is an undercover operator working for a provincial Fish and Wildlife agency or more frequently these days, an RCMP Customs and Excise member.

The illegal trade in bear parts has exploded in Canada in the last five years and shows no signs of diminishing. The parts are destined for the Asian food and herbal medicine markets. Prices vary greatly from one area to another for the parts but generally, if the product comes from a wild bear (a photograph or video of the kill and part removal helps validate its source), then the greatest price can be obtained. Current prices range up to \$60 per paw and to \$150 per gall bladder (approximately \$7.50 per gram of bile) in Canada. When these products are smuggled back to Korea, Hong Kong or China the "middleman" gets up to \$429 per paw, and up to \$650 per gram of gall bladder bile.

Value

At the retail end, the price has jumped to \$650 per paw, served as a delicacy (roast paw) in expensive restaurants. The paw pad can also be removed from the foot and used in soups which sell for up to \$250 per bowl. The bile sells at \$300 per gram in the herbal medicine industry where it is believed to be a cold medicine used to help cure heat diseases in the body such as infections, fevers and arthritis to name a few. (Bear bile is not used as an aphrodisiac.) When current prices for cocaine only reach \$100 per

gram, it is easy to see the great value placed on bear parts by the Asian population.

Extinction

This Asian trade in bear parts has led to the near extinction of the Asiatic Black Bear and it is currently listed in the endangered category, Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) as demand increases other species of bears are being sought for their parts and today we see all species of bears worldwide listed in either the endangered or threatened (Appendix II) categories of CITES, Canada's Black, Grizzly, and Polar Bears are all listed in the threatened Appendix II category and all are currently experiencing pressure from the illegal parts trade.

CITES

CITES is an international trade agreement signed by over 120 nations to control and monitor the movement of endangered species throughout the world. Canada enforces the rules of the CITES' convention through the Export and Import Permits Act (EIPA). Presently, there is a new federal law called the Wild Animal and Plant Protection and Regulation of International and Interprovincial Trade Act (WAPPIITA) which removes CITES enforcement from the Export and Import Permits Act and gives it an Act of its own. Powers and penalties for the illegal trade, import, export and possession of endangered species will be greatly increased. There will finally be an effective tool by which to go after international wildlife dealers—from the poacher to the retailer.

Every day, more cases of the illegal poaching, of bears, strictly for their galls and feet are being reported. Judges are becoming familiar with charges both under provincial wildlife legislation and under the EIPA. Penalties have increased to as high as \$350 per gram of illegal bile (when in possession) and jail terms are common, in addition to the fine.

The bear kill

America holds 75 per cent (approximately 600,000) of the world's remaining bear population and two thirds of these animals live in Canada. Recent undercover operations show that for every killed bear, there is at least one that is illegally slaughtered—and this is quickly reaching a two-to-one ratio. This brings the yearly kill (legal and illegal) to between 80,000 and 120,000 bears.

The lower mainland of British Columbia houses the largest Asian community in the world outside of continental Asia. It is here that an increasing number of bears are being found with only their feet and galls removed. But bears are

just one of the Canadian species sought internationally. Trade involving cougars (bones, galls, skulls and claws), eagles (talons, skulls and feathers), and walrus (tusks and skulls) are also on the rise and Canada must immediately begin to take more international enforcement action.

Enforcement

RCMP Commissioner Murray stated in the priorities of the 1994 Strategic Plan that environmental issues would be given priority in future enforcement. On February 8, 1995, Assistant Commissioner J.T.G. Ryan stated in a memorandum to all Federal Enforcement and Customs and Excise units across Canada that a division coordinator be elected and members in each unit are to be assigned to proactively enforce CITES.

These members will work closely with Environment Canada, Canada Customs, Agriculture Canada, provincial or municipal police forces, and provincial Fish and Wildlife officers to ensure enforcement in this area is effective and a team approach is used. This is exciting and extremely good news since it will allow units to direct more resources to this area of enforcement.

Conclusion

The international wildlife trade is now the second largest area of illegal activity in the world and is only barely surpassed by the drug trade. The legal wildlife trade in North America exceeds \$20 billion per year, and Interpol has estimated that the illegal trade is above \$5 billion per year. As the international prices continue to rise, so will the trade and there will be greater involvement by organised crime syndicates.

It is recognised by agencies worldwide that the biggest downfall of CITES is effective enforcement. The exchange of endangered species for drugs grows daily as more and more drug cartels see the value in this trade—low to minimal enforcement; extremely high profits; minimal penalties if caught; and the low inspection rates at international borders—these are all factors causing this trade to grow. This is becoming big business and for an investigator, it is an extremely interesting, and challenging area of enforcement.

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Biography

Constable. Ken Chatel is recognised by the Canada Wildlife Services as an expert in the identification of endangered species listed under CITES and has given expert testimony in court on the identification of ivory products and the international trade in ivory and bear products.