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END IN SIGHT FOR BEAR-BILE FARMS?

It's hard to believe, I know, but there's some good news to report from China.

Animals Asia has just announced the biggest bear rescue ever attempted anywhere in the world. It will be working with a state farmer who has decided to stop the barbaric practice of keeping live bears to extract their bile.

He could have sold his 130 animals to another bile farm, and made a lot of money in the process, but instead he has agreed to turn his farm into an enormous rescue centre. His staff will work alongside Animals Asia and they will learn how to care for the bears properly.

It's estimated that there could be more than 10,000 bears (mainly Asiatic black – or moon – bears, but also sun and brown bears) in about 100 farms in China alone, and there are thousands more elsewhere in Asia.

They are kept in tiny 'crush cages', in which they can barely move, and are milked once or twice a day. A permanent hole is drilled into their abdomens and gall bladders, then metal tubes are inserted so that

the bile flows out drip by drip. It is used in traditional Chinese medicine.

Rescuing 130 bears doesn't solve the wider problem, of course – and, at an estimated cost of \$5m, it won't come cheap.

But this could be the start of something big. This dreadful practice is increasingly unpopular in China (Animals Asia statistics show that 87 per cent of Chinese people

ANIMALS ASIA REPORTS THAT 87 PER CENT OF CHINESE PEOPLE ARE AGAINST BEAR FARMING.

are against bear farming) and the hope is that it will set a precedent that could finally end bear-bile farming.

So maybe there is hope. If the Chinese can turn their backs on bear bile, maybe they can stop drinking tiger-bone wine, eating shark-fin soup, carving elephant ivory, taking rhino-horn medicine and generally being by far the main consumers of wildlife on the planet. Ultimately, the future of all these species – and many more – is in their hands.