



# MARK CARWARDINE WILD THOUGHTS

Good news, at last: the Chinese have shown a rare glimmer of compassion for wildlife. In recent weeks, there has been an unprecedented outcry across the country against bear-bile farming.

A high-profile chorus of protest from celebrities, doctors, scientists and members of the public is demanding an end to the cruel practice in which bears are kept in battery-farm conditions while bile is drained from their gall bladders to be used as an ingredient in traditional Chinese medicine.

Unfortunately, bear farming is just the tip of the iceberg, and it's been blindingly obvious for far too long that the Chinese are to blame for pushing many endangered species to the brink of extinction.

Up to 100 million sharks are killed every year to provide shark-fin soup for Chinese communities across the world. Tigers are killed to make tiger-bone wine, which is drunk in China to improve strength and vitality. Rhinos are killed for their horns, which are ground into a powder and used as a cure-all wonder drug.

And then China has the largest illegal ivory trade of any nation in the world and is directly responsible for the renewed poaching crisis facing many elephant populations in Africa. It drives the global timber trade, it is the largest importer of live tropical reef fish, it takes over 20 million seahorses from the wild every year to be dried and sold to treat everything from asthma to sexual dysfunction... the catalogue of destruction is almost endless.

Admittedly, there are many devoted conservation and animal welfare groups in China, and many international groups working with the Chinese in an effort to solve these problems, but when you combine such an insatiable appetite for endangered wildlife products with a booming economy and growing wealth, it's no wonder that the problems sometimes seem insurmountable.

The big question is whether the bear-bile campaign is a mere ripple or an indication that the tide of public opinion could be – albeit at a snail's pace – starting to turn.



**Out of juice: bear-bile farming is coming under attack in China.**

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