

International Bear News



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Photographs of an Asiatic black bear (left), and two sun bears (right) at baited camera trap stations, Khao Yai National Park, Thailand. Bears stood to investigate the bait and thereby exposed their chest marks. These chest markings are individually distinguishable. Read about researchers estimating the abundance of these two bear species in Thailand on page 30.

Increased Enforcement and Reduced Demand: Tackling the Illegal Bear Trade in Malaysia

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TRAFFIC Southeast Asia has embarked on an exciting mission to significantly reduce the illegal trade in bear parts and derivatives across Southeast Asia.

Our work is guided by a comprehensive assessment on the trade in bear parts and derivatives that has formed the baseline for our efforts to enhance enforcement, policy and advocacy, and to reduce consumer demand. Our research also provides a basis to measure success and guide subsequent actions. Some issues are being tackled at a regional level, whereas many activities are taking place at a national level. Malaysia is one of the countries where TRAFFIC Southeast Asia has strived to clamp down on the trade.

Malaysia is comprised of Peninsular Malaysia, connected to mainland Southeast Asia, and the two states of Sabah and Sarawak (which together with Indonesia's Kalimantan and the nation of Brunei, form the island of Borneo). Malaysia only has one native species of bear, the sun bear (*Helarctos malayanus*). Two subspecies are recognized, with *H. m. malayanus* occurring on Peninsular Malaysia (and all of mainland Southeast Asia, as well as Sumatra, Indonesia) and *H. m. euryspilus* on Borneo (Meijaard 2004).

The sun bear is categorised as Vulnerable by the IUCN (Fredriksson et al. 2008). It is also listed on Appendix I of CITES, which effectively means that all international commercial trade in live sun bears or their parts and products are illegal.

Malaysia is divided into three, semi-autonomous administrative regions: Peninsular Malaysia (comprising 11 states and two territories), Sabah and Sarawak. Peninsular Malaysia's Wildlife Conservation Act 2010 (WCA 2010) is far superior to Sabah's Wildlife Conservation Enactment 1997 and Sarawak's Wild Life Protection Ordinance 1998. The WCA 2010 lists the sun bear as Totally Protected, with anyone convicted of any crime involving sun bear being liable to a fine of MYR 100,000 (US\$ 32,250) or up to three years in jail, or both.

In contrast, laws in Sabah and especially Sarawak are much weaker. In Sarawak, sun bears are listed as Protected, but not Totally Protected where offences involving sun bears yield a maximum fine of MYR 10,000 (\$ 3,220) and a one year jail term.



Map of Malaysia.



Bear gall bladders observed in a traditional medicine shop in Sabah in 2012.

Nonetheless, if effectively enforced, these laws along with the International Trade in Endangered Species Act 2008, Sale of Drugs Act 1952, Medicines Act 1956 and the Customs Duties Order 2007 are robust enough to completely eliminate the illegal bear trade in Malaysia.

Understanding the Trade

An investigation of the bear parts trade by TRAFFIC Southeast Asia found that Malaysia ranked fourth among 13 countries and territories in East and Southeast Asia (Foley et al. 2011). With at least 77% of the shops surveyed (n=212) having bear products available, Malaysia emerged as a country of high concern.

While many vendors reported that bear products were sourced from within the country, as much as 66% of the products originated from five countries outside of Malaysia, foremost being China. This trade is in blatant violation of CITES, to which all of these countries are Parties.

Illegal Trade

In response to this, in 2012, TRAFFIC Southeast Asia undertook a two-pronged approach to enhance understanding of the trade: more in-depth nationwide surveys of traditional medicine retail outlets and a consumer attitude survey in Peninsular Malaysia. A bear product consumption survey has never been done in Malaysia, and the results will be used to help guide future policy and advocacy needs. This information, along with that derived from the trade surveys, will be at the core of future work to reduce demand.

In addition to bear parts being used for medicine, wild meat is sold to restaurants. In 2010, a compilation and analysis of bear-related seizures from Malaysia revealed that only meat had been seized in Peninsular Malaysia, not traditional medicinal products (Shepherd and Shepherd 2010), as the legislation at that time did not sufficiently cover derivatives and products. Seizures between 2005 and 2009 accounted for at least 33 bears that had been killed for meat. The largest bear meat seizure occurred in 2009 and involved parts from at least 13 sun bears. If these bears were all taken from one population, it could obviously have had devastating effects.

In response to the levels of meat seized, TRAFFIC Southeast Asia carried out surveys on the trade and consumption of wild meat across Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak, with all instances of bear, or other illegal wildlife, reported to authorities for action.

Trade assessments on wildlife used for traditional medicine and wild meat consumption have confirmed high levels of illegal trade involving bears in Malaysia, yet the levels of enforcement action to deter such activities is far from adequate.

Beyond Trade Assessments

All information collected during surveys has been provided to the relevant federal and state enforcement agencies. Enforcement efforts are underway and we continue to work closely with the agencies to provide technical support in combating this trade. Information has also been shared with Malaysia's Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment.

In 2012, we presented findings of the surveys from traditional medicine shops in Malaysia at the 9th World Congress of Chinese Medicine in Kuching, Sarawak. We have engaged the Federation of Chinese Physicians and Medicine Dealers Association of Malaysia (FCPMDAM), who hosted the Kuching conference, urging this influential association to call upon their member associations

to stop prescribing, selling, and promoting the use of bear parts and derivatives. There are more than 50 legal herbal alternatives to bear bile (Pong et al. 2001) and we are encouraging the association to promote these instead.

In an effort to raise the awareness of the current situation to a broader audience, in September 2013, we presented on the need for enhanced protection of bears in Malaysia to the Bear Taxon Advisory Group at the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA). This meeting, in Edinburgh, was hosted by the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland.

The following month, we presented our findings on the trade assessment on bear products and wild meat to governments, research institutions, and civil society partners in Sarawak. The extent of the illegal trade there, and the need for tougher enforcement was highlighted as immediate priorities. We will continue to engage with the Government of Sarawak to enhance legal protection for bears and associated enforcement support.

Two Malaysia-focused peer-reviewed reports are being prepared for publication: one on the wild meat trade and the other on bear bile trade. Keep an eye on the TRAFFIC website for these - www.traffic.org - and other news on our progress towards ending illegal bear trade in Malaysia and other key countries in Southeast Asia.

Acknowledgements

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Human Bear Conflicts

A New Project to Manage Bear-Human Conflicts in Northern Pindos National Park, Greece

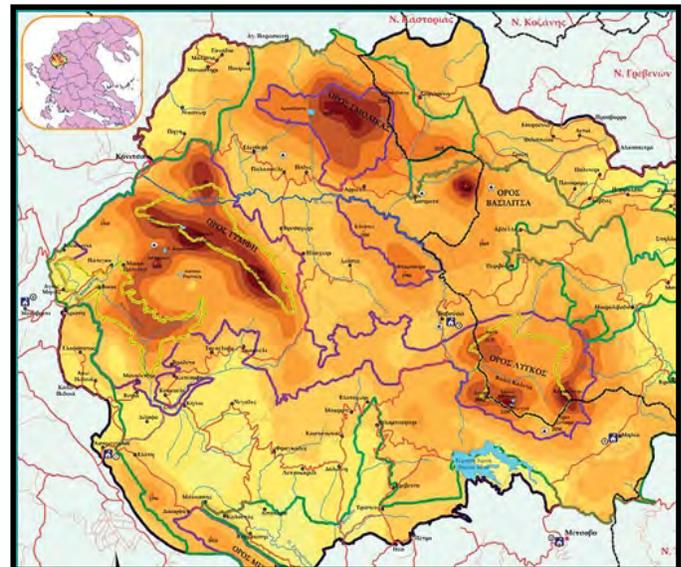
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A new project to manage bear-human conflicts in Northern Pindos National Park, Greece was officially launched in October 2013. Formally entitled “Conservation actions for improving conditions of bear-human coexistence in Northern Pindos National Park,” the project will be coordinated by the Municipality of Grevena, the non-government organization Callisto, the Regional Development Agency of Grevena, and the Management Body of Northern Pindos National Park. The project will last four years (2013–2017), and will implement concrete and innovative (for Greece) conservation and management actions to minimize bear-human conflicts and promote bear-human coexistence inside the National Park.

Covering 2,000 km² and encompassing more than 45 villages, the Northern Pindos National Park (NPNP) is the largest park in the country. It is characterized by an outstanding natural environment comprising high mountain massifs (up to 2,637 m elevation), deep canyons (the most famous worldwide being the Vikos canyon with a depth of 1,200 m), and dense coniferous and deciduous forests. Moreover, the NPNP hosts a large and expanding brown bear population, one of the most important in the Pindos mountain range, estimated at 80-150 individuals.



Map of Northern Pindos National Park, Pindos Mountain Range, northwestern Greece.

Human-bear conflicts in the park

The proximity of human settlements to bear habitat, and the fact that the NPNP bear population is increasing, has led in recent years to increasing bear-human interactions with negative repercussions for the conservation of the bears. The urgent need to resolve this critical situation has led to the initiation and implementation of this new project.