



Q&A: coronavirus, China's wildlife trade and wet-markets

On 24 February 2020, the Standing Committee of the People's Congress in China passed a decision to ban the consumption of wildlife as food, and the illegal wildlife trade. We welcome and applaud the government's efforts to control the COVID-19 outbreak. There's been a lot of misinformation online recently, around the subject of coronavirus and the connection to China's wildlife trade, the ban on the trade and wet-markets. We bring you some simple Q&A to help separate fact from fiction.

1. Was the wildlife trade banned in China on 24 February 2020?

No. Unfortunately, the law passed only bans the trade in wildlife for food, and bans people in China from eating wild animal species. All commercial trades in wildlife for other purposes are still permitted.

2. What other types of wildlife trade are still permitted in China?

Currently there are five purposes listed for intensively farmed wildlife in China:

1. Food
2. Fur/clothing
3. Medicinal
4. Viewing/tourism (entertainment)
5. Experiments

The ban on the trade in wildlife results from the outbreak of COVID-19, and applies only to the use of wild animals as food. Breeding and trading for all the other four purposes are still permitted. As an example, under the new ban meat

from pythons cannot be eaten. But python blood and gall bladder can still be used for medicine, and the skin for musical instruments. So farming and trading pythons for non-food uses is still allowed. Farming bears for bear bile is also allowed, as the use is categorised as 'medicinal'.

3. How many species of wildlife are bred in intensive farms, and what is the scale of the industry?

Several hundred species of wildlife are farmed in captivity in China, and 54 of these hundreds of species are classified under the 'matured captive breeding technique' by the State forestry Administration. It is reported that the captive wildlife farming industry is worth \$74 billion, according to the China Academy of Engineering. It is difficult to estimate the total number of wild animals captive in farms, but hundreds of millions of individual animals is probable.

4. So did China ban eating wildlife or not?

Yes, but not completely. There are many nuances and exceptions.

- a) Many species of wild animal in China are listed as 'livestock'. This list includes fox, mink, raccoon dog and many other species of wild animals. 'Livestock' receives no protection from the new law.
- b) Aquatic wild animals and farmed amphibians and reptiles, such as sea cucumbers, turtles, buffalo frogs and crocodiles can still be farmed and eaten until further notice.

5. Which animals are actually protected by the new ban?

None - no animals are completely protected by the new ban. The law states that certain species, including pangolin, civets, bats, tigers and various others cannot be eaten as meat. But these species could still be farmed for any other purpose, such as fur, medicine, entertainment or experiments.

6. Have wet-markets have been banned?

No. The term 'wet-market' has been commonly misreported. A wet-market is simply an open wholesale market selling a wide range of seafood or farm products. In China, it's common to shop at the local open market instead of the supermarket, for fruit, vegetables, grains, dried foods, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and other goods, as well as meat and live animals. We are not asking China to ban markets selling seafood or farm produce. We are asking China to ban the sale of all live animals, and meat from any wildlife, including commercially-bred wildlife listed as livestock.

7. Are pangolins and a few other species protected at least?

No. Pangolins can be farmed for commercial medicinal purposes, as long as the farm has a permit from the local government. Pangolin scales are used in TCM. Pangolin claws can still be sold as decorative items. However, the breeding of pangolins is difficult in captivity, so pangolin 'farms' often become an outlet for illegally caught wild pangolins. The same applies to captive bears, which are confined for their bile, and deer, which are kept for their meat, antlers and skin.

8. Which species of animals can still be sold live at markets?

Many species, including wildlife exempt from being eaten (see Q4), companion animals, and those considered farm animals in the West can legally be sold live at markets. They can also be caged live and selected for slaughter by the customer.

9. Does the new ban say anything about the use of wild animals for fur?

No. Wild animals bred and farmed for fur are not recognised as wildlife, as they are listed as 'livestock' under China's legislation. According to data released by the Chinese Academy of Engineering, the wildlife trade in China is valued at \$74 billion, employing more than 14 million people, with the fur industry accounting for 74%. If the farming and trade in fur animals is not also prohibited in the new law, then China has barely scratched the surface of banning the commercial trade in wildlife, and all our endeavours to protect and conserve wildlife will be in vain.

10. Tell me again: what does the new law actually say?

The new law says wet-markets can no longer sell wild animals to eat – not live or as meat. But remember the definition of ‘wild animal’ does not include wildlife listed as livestock (see Q4). Among the hundreds of species still sold dead and alive at wet markets are fox, rabbit, poultry, dog, mink and deer. The distinction between wild and domestic is not the same in China as much of the world.

11. What is ACTAsia doing to stop the wildlife trade in China?

ACTAsia is running a [petition](#) which we will report to the National People’s Congress in China. We desperately need more signatures to show global support for an end to the trade in wildlife for all commercial purposes. We want to protect the global human population against future outbreaks of zoonotic disease, and protect animals from commercial exploitation.

ACTAsia reaches the public in China through our Caring for Life Education (CFL) programme, which helps people to understand the interconnectedness of all life on earth, reducing demand for goods that exploit people, animals and our environment. Through CFL we reach primary children, consumers and influential professionals in China and other parts of Asia. This is the core of our work.

12. And what can I do to help?

If you haven’t signed our petition yet, then we’d ask you to sign it and share it with friends and family. Follow us on social media, and share our posts. We want to increase our reach.

If you can support our work financially, then we would be extremely grateful for a donation, especially a monthly donation. With these funds, we can reach further and deeper into Asian society, offering Caring for Life Education to people of all ages from all walks of life.