

What conservationists expect from a Wildlife Protection Law

Yu Fengqin, Renmin Zhengxie, January 12, 2016

The author is a conservationist and leader of Beijing Green Ark. In this commentary piece, she expresses strong opposition to the draft – “*the draft clearly stipulates that wildlife (including captive-bred endangered species) and wildlife products can be used as healthcare and food products, requiring only the approval of wildlife departments. This is somewhat surprising; geographically speaking, no country openly utilises wildlife as food; historically, there is no historical period and no law that openly stipulates that wildlife can be used as food. Moreover, China has never had any inspection criteria when it comes to use of wildlife and wildlife products as food. Even the long-maligned Wildlife Protection Law in its current form contains no stipulations for wildlife being used as food.*

She then elaborated her opposition with three main points – “*Firstly, consumption of wildlife as food is detrimental to epidemic control, and presents a challenge to public health and safety. During an interview with the author, Mr Zhao Shengli, Vice Secretary-General of the China Wildlife Conservation Association, says that back then, many epidemics were related to wildlife.*

Secondly, consumption of wildlife as food is detrimental to wildlife management. China operates a permit system for the domestication and captive breeding of wildlife (including species under special state protection), but has only done so for around 20 years. Within these 20 years, China’s wild populations have declined dramatically in number. Guangxi resident Liu Wu, variously termed ‘Swan King’ and ‘Bird King’, is a good example of this. Liu and his ally, Gao Jixing of ‘Shandong Jixing Breeding Centre’ bought and sold a large number of protected species under the guise of a ‘domestication and captive breeding permit’. Their activities led to the deaths of a large number of birds, including Tundra Swan, Ruddy Shelduck, Bar-headed Goose, Grey Heron, Eurasian Coot, Spot-billed Duck, Swan Goose and Bean Goose, and caused a great deal of damage to the natural environment. On October 26, 2015, Liu was sentenced to 13 years in prison for the illegal sale and purchase of endangered wildlife by the Gaoxin District Court in Jining, Shandong Province. His accomplices, including Gao Jixing, were sentenced to 12 years and 6 months, 9 years and 5 years. Liu and his accomplices were only forced to stop when their actions were met with a great outcry by society.

Thirdly, wildlife is not a product that people need in their lives. Some Chinese people eat wildlife, and onlookers overseas cannot understand this behaviour. In fact, many Chinese people are similarly unable to understand. With regards to this issue, one official from the State Forestry Bureau once stated decisively, “Wildlife is not a product that people need in their lives. The law should prohibit the eating of wildlife.”

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