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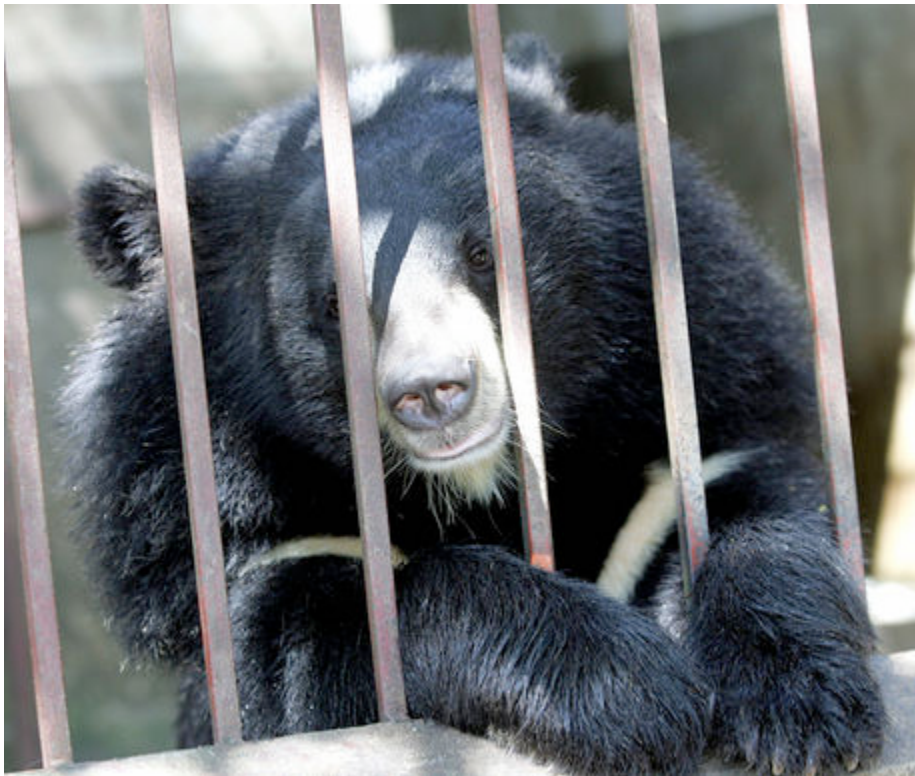
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Bearing Down On Poachers

Written by Marsha Johnston

Thursday, 01 May 2008



Ever feel righteous anger at traditional Chinese medicine manufacturers because of the arrogant practice of killing wild animals for a single body part, just to improve a man's sex life or ease a stomachache?

Well, hold onto your tiger bones, folks. Despite the existence of alternatives to bear bile, which is

used to treat "hot" ailments such as fevers and joint inflammation, [demand for bear parts is soaring](#). And since Asia's supply—comprising five different bear populations—has been decimated, poachers are increasingly mutilating U.S. bears to get their gallbladders to a flourishing black market.

In powdered form, a bear gallbladder is worth more than its weight in gold, says Ann Bryant, director of the Bear Education Aversion Response team, which [reported a rise in bear poaching](#) late last year. And those parts aren't just for export, as they often end up in Asian medicine markets in major U.S. cities, says Nilanga Jayasinghe, field conservation coordinator for Defenders of Wildlife.

The rise in illegal bear kills, to the tune of 30,000 or more per year, continues in part because the existing patchwork of state laws makes a ban on trafficking in bear parts unenforceable. Today, 34 states prohibit trade in bear gall bladders and bile, but five other states allow it, and the rest prohibit it for "in-state" bears but allow it for "out-of-state" bears, says Jayasinghe. She adds that there is really no easy or practical way to prove where a killed bear came from.

Enter the Bear Protection Act (HR 5534), introduced by Reps Raul Grijalva (D-AZ) and John Campbell (R-CA), which would ban trade in bear gallbladders at the federal level. Currently in the House Natural Resources Committee, the Act has attracted 25 co-sponsors, but is apparently getting some early opposition from the NRA.

Why the NRA would be opposed is unclear, since the legislation would put absolutely no restrictions on existing bear hunting. Maybe someone should tell them that [Jackie Chan is helping out](#) the supporters of this bill.

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