



NATURE NEEDS MORE

THE NEW WAY OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

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For Immediate release

Captive Breeding Facilities Supply Fashion, Food & Medicine

Whilst there has been a call for wet markets to be permanently closed, these are not the only locations where humans are vulnerable to zoonotic diseases. The line between us and exotic animals has long been breached given the rapid growth in the **legal** trade of wildlife.

Taking a step back in the supply chain, the risks aren't only "wet markets" they are also about "**legal captive breeding facilities**". Before COVID-19 few people would have known about China's 22,000 legal captive breeding facilities.

These captive breeding facilities are the source of product to the fashion, food and medicine industries etc. Any industry that involves humans handling (not just consumption of) exotic animals poses a risk of animal-to-human transmission for a newly evolved virus. Also, it does not matter what these facilities breed for – meat or skin, if they are close to areas where bats live for example, the chain of transmission can happen again.

While the world is talking about wet markets in China and throughout Asia, it is avoiding seeing this as an issue of legal global trade. Let's just take one species as an example – python. A species that is captively bred in Asia; and legally and illegally harvested from the wild in the region.

1. **96% of python skins are used in the European fashion market**
2. **In 2013 the value of the python skin market was estimated to be over US\$1 billion annually**
3. Large scale laundering of illegal python skins into the legal marketplace is happening, just one seizure of illegal python skins in China in 2016 having an estimated value of US\$48 million

So, with a billion dollars' worth of legal skins being exported from Asia to the fashion industry, what will these industries and companies be doing in response to outcry to close the trade? They will be lobbying to keep captive breeding facilities open as they don't allow their supply chain to dry up given the value of the market.

As the apparel industry tries to project its good corporate citizen image, via the evolving sustainable fashion mantra, it is handy for them to use the story that **your exotic leather handbag, shoes or belt are just a by-product of the food industry.** Lynn Johnson of Nature Needs More Ltd, together with collaborative partner Donalea Patman of For the Love of Wildlife Ltd experienced this personally while in Europe last year for CITES CoP18. During the mid-conference break they took the 4-hour drive from Geneva to Milan, to take a look at what was on sale in one of the top fashion destinations in the world. Milan's luxury retail sector was teeming with fur, exotic leather and feathers.



"Our main reason for traveling was to check the sales assistant's knowledge of CITES regulations for listed species." said Dr Lynn Johnson of Nature Needs More. **One pattern of comments, when asking about python and stingray accessories for example, was that the products were made from the by-product of the meat industry**

and locals in supply-side countries eat the meat. Luxury fashion brands were happy to use their connection with the exotic meat consumption in Asia, as a play to promote their sustainable fashion credentials.

“We could give other examples such as with sting ray, given the market is flooded with sting ray accessories this year.” said Donalea Patman of For the Love of Wildlife. CITES marine species, under its regulations “Introduction from the sea”, is even more poorly monitored than terrestrial species.

In the media, what we are seeing is some conservation scientists want a trade ban and some don't; some people are calling for a ban of wet markets and others are calling for a ban on captive breeding facilities. This has been the normal state of affairs for decades and has resulted in business as usual, ***which is maintaining as much legal trade as possible. This in turn means maintaining captive breeding facilities and the handling of wildlife in these facilities (even if the wet markets are closed down). And this legal trade is opaque globally.***

If these captive breeding facilities are to stay open, who will pay for monitoring to ensure:

1. **Meat doesn't make its way into the food chain, if eating such meat is banned?**
2. **That all new health and safety rules are enforced?**
3. **The supply chain is transparent?**

Right now, because these businesses are flying under the radar, they feel no pressure to make a contribution even though they are making massive profits.

Summarising:

1. Any industry that involves humans handling exotic animals poses a risk of animal-to-human transmission for a newly evolved virus
2. There is no reason that jump can't happen directly at a captive breeding facility or at an abattoir, human handling the animals is enough for transmission
3. It does not matter what these facilities breed for – meat or skin, if they are close to areas where bats live, for example, the chain of transmission can happen again
4. The businesses that use such facilities in their supply chain aren't contributing to ensuring transparency, the first step would be modernising CITES to an electronic permit system.
5. Modernising the CITES legal trade permit and management system will make supply chains more transparent and helps to address the biosecurity risks inherent in any trade in exotic wildlife for meat/skin/fur; as well as help tackle the illegal wildlife trade.

This is why we are focusing on this overlooked aspect of the trade in species. Only by investing in and upgrading the inadequate CITES trade permit and management system, that facilitates the international legal trade, can supply-chains be made transparent to address the future biosecurity risks inherent in any trade in exotic wildlife. Currently, this CITES system is still a 1970s paper-based and doesn't integrate with world customs.

About Nature Needs More

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