

BEAR BILE FARMING



AnimalsAsia
Kindness in action

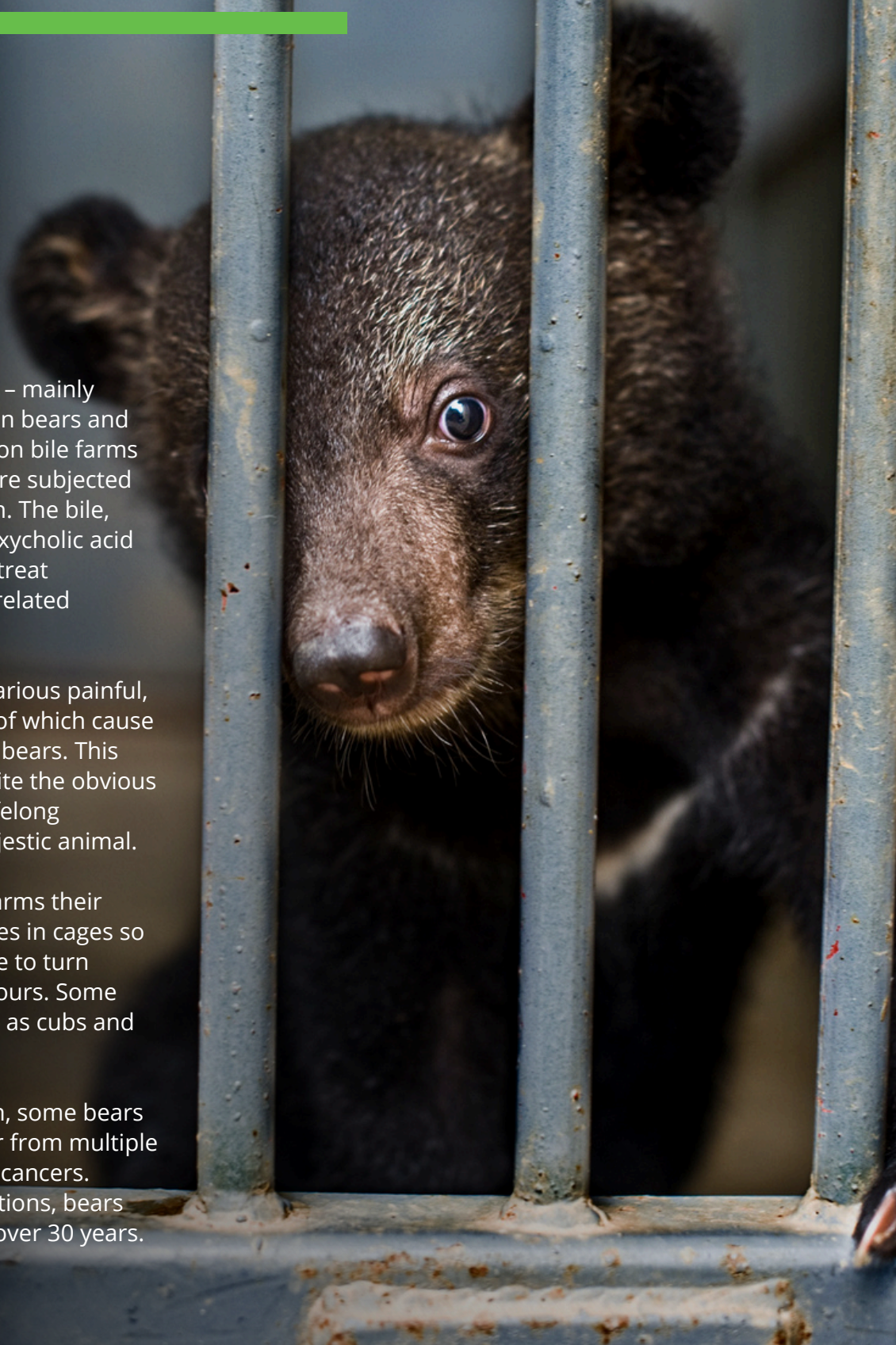
The issue

More than 10,000 bears – mainly moon bears, but also sun bears and brown bears – are kept on bile farms across Asia. The bears are subjected to regular bile extraction. The bile, which contains ursodeoxycholic acid (UDCA) is often used to treat inflammatory and liver-related conditions.

Bile is extracted using various painful, invasive techniques, all of which cause massive infection in the bears. This practice continues despite the obvious issues concerning the lifelong incarceration of this majestic animal.

Bile bears are kept on farms their entire lives, in some cases in cages so small that they're unable to turn around or stand on all fours. Some bears are put into cages as cubs and are never released.

To boost bile production, some bears are starved. Many suffer from multiple diseases and malignant cancers. Despite the harsh conditions, bears can survive like this for over 30 years.



Focus areas

Animals Asia's work to end bear bile farming focuses on five key areas:

1. Bear sanctuaries

We build sanctuaries where rescued bile farm bears are rehabilitated and live out the rest of their lives.

Our world-class sanctuaries in Chengdu, China and Tam Dao, Vietnam provide the bears with comfortable dens and semi-natural enclosures where they're able to recover in safety and spend their remaining years in the company of other bears. To date, nearly 700 bears have been received into our care.

In 2023, we opened our second sanctuary in Vietnam. This came after we signed a historic agreement with the Vietnamese government to end bear bile farming for good. This new sanctuary will be home to around 250 bears, the last survivors of the country's bile industry.

During their rehabilitation, the bears are closely monitored through regular health checks and daily observations. This not only ensures that the bears receive the best care possible, but also enables our staff to gather vital scientific data on Asiatic black bears (moon bears).

The sanctuaries also provide direct employment of hundreds of local people in areas such as veterinary and daily bear care, horticulture, food preparation and security. Hundreds more local people are employed indirectly through services and construction.



2. Reducing demand

In Vietnam, our work with the Vietnamese Traditional Medicine Association has seen all its members – around 60,000 – pledge never to prescribe bear bile.

We also work with schools and communities in bear farming areas in Vietnam – providing free herbal medicine clinics, helping children create gardens that grow herbal alternatives to bear bile, and giving presentations and running art competitions at schools.

3. The bile trade

We monitor the changing trends in the trade of bear bile and parts. We keep track of the producers, sellers and end consumers of bear products and work to maintain up-to-date intelligence on the location, size and operation of the bear bile industry.

We work with local and national authorities to run awareness-raising campaigns promote the existing laws on buying and exporting bear bile. And we encourage and assist with enforcement of these laws.



4. Public awareness

We run extensive public awareness campaigns about the industry and build support for an end to bear bile farming. We run social media and billboard campaigns, and give presentations to communities, schools and traditional medicine universities.

We engage with the media in Asia, as well as internationally, to ensure wide coverage of the bear bile industry – and committed celebrities help us bring this message to the public. The internet and social media have become vital means of reaching the public, enabling us to rally support.

We also work with dozens of animal welfare groups and over 20 university student groups to help us bring the message to the public through street displays, photo exhibitions, plays, poster art and social media.



5. Government and policy

We engage with government authorities, public representatives and policy-makers to build support for the bears.

Our senior staff lobby political, business, legal and cultural leaders, gathering support for the bears' cause. We also engage support from scientific experts and other influential individuals.

We stay aware of changing political dynamics and policy-making environments. This is essential to ensure we pursue the best avenues for building a consensus towards an end to bear bile farming. Our work involves building relationships and establishing dialogues with a variety of official departments, groups and individuals who can help our cause.

In Vietnam, we work with local and national authorities to run awareness-raising campaigns on the existing laws banning the sale of bear bile.

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