

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Turtles killed or sold alive in Tesco stores continue to suffer profoundly even before reaching the stores. They continue to suffer while on display and are killed experiencing extreme pain. "I am opposed to marketing turtles for human consumption by any ethnic community," says Prof. Frye. "Furthermore, the conditions under which I understand that these animals are kept from the time that they are captured, during shipment, their presale holding, and final disposition are abysmal." "There is simply no way to kill reptiles humanely in a retail environment, and still have the animal fit for human consumption," adds Tortoise Aid Director, Annie Lancaster. For this reason alone, Tesco should stop these sales.

Evidence from the past 12 months clearly shows that Tesco is unable to enforce even the most rudimentary improvements to the welfare of the turtles it sells. According to its staff, Tesco also sells wild turtles, which further depletes struggling wild populations.



Wild freshwater turtle sunning itself on a log



Tied up in plastic netting for sale in Chinese Tesco store

World Chelonian Trust Director, Prof. Darrell Senneke, says, "As **wild turtles can not be removed without harming the species as a whole** and the slaughter of farmed animals can not be done humanly under existing conditions, I fully support the separation of any commercial business from any aspect of turtles for the food trade"

In the words of Prof. Shi, "the fusion of China's growth with China's utilitarian attitude toward nature emphasizes quick profit over sustaining biodiversity. **It is unlikely that the black market turtle farms could ever be controlled.**"

"Sales of turtles for food or medicinal purposes are driving natural populations to extinction," says Professor of Reptology Dr. Harvey Lillywhite. "**The cruellest aspect of turtle sales by companies such as Tesco is the extinction of populations and species worldwide.** Please make your profit in some other way."

Tesco's Corporate Responsibility Policy states that the company is "committed to conducting business in an ethical and socially responsible manner", and that Tesco uses "up-to-date knowledge of research, ethics, scientific facts and legislation to ensure this happens".

Twelve months ago Care for the Wild International provided published research and expert opinions about the devastating welfare and conservation impact of the activities in which the company participates to Tesco's Corporate Responsibility team. But **undeterred by scientific facts and its own policies, Tesco insists on maintaining an untenable position.** A member of Tesco's Corporate Responsibility team told CWI that it is not for Tesco to judge, and that it is Tesco's job to give its customers what they want. **This is both irresponsible and unreasonable, and no amount of denial, corporate spin and excuses will change that.**

Leading veterinary, scientific and chelonian authorities and relevant professional bodies therefore urge Tesco to cease trading in turtles and bullfrogs for food on conservation and animal welfare grounds.

As a Tesco shareholder, you can ensure your company listens to the scientific evidence.



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Care for the Wild International promotes the conservation and welfare of wild animals around the world through direct projects, education, research and science-led advocacy.



Together with Care for the Wild, 27 leading veterinary, scientific and chelonian experts, and professional bodies urge Tesco to stop selling turtles and bullfrogs in China on conservation and animal welfare grounds.

China's hunger for turtle meat has sparked an acute extinction crisis. By selling freshwater turtles for food in its Chinese outlets Tesco is part of the growing extinction crisis afflicting these species.

Tesco either butchers these animals in store or sells them alive to be slaughtered at home.

Led by British wildlife charity Care for the Wild International (CWI), efforts to dissuade Tesco from selling live American bullfrogs and turtles in its Chinese outlets have continued since June 2006. Opposition focuses around:

- **Animal welfare concerns related to farming, transport, display and slaughter (in store and at home).**
- **The conservation impact of turtle consumption in China.**

After assessing background information provided by Care for the Wild International, Tesco introduced policy changes to address some of the animal welfare problems associated with selling live turtles last June. These included:

- Removing hardshell turtles from sale because to it is not possible to access the animal's head for decapitation without breaking the shell.
- Replacing decapitation as a killing method with decapitation followed by crushing of the skull to reduce time to death.

Care for the Wild visited 32 Tesco stores across China in April and May 2008 and found that staff fail to adhere to Tesco's new slaughter policies.

In 12 stores where slaughter was observed, staff continued to kill turtles either by decapitation alone or by evisceration through the plastron (underside of the shell). CWI also found large numbers of disembowelled turtles with intact heads packed up for sale. Tesco staff also confirmed that turtles are killed through decapitation, and customers requesting advice on home slaughter were told to cut off the turtle's head and legs.



One of many dead and disembowelled turtles with its head intact on sale

Together with Care for the Wild, 27 of the world's most renowned veterinary, scientific and chelonian experts and relevant professional bodies urge Tesco to cease trading in wild and farmed turtles and bullfrogs for food on conservation and animal welfare grounds.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Veterinary and scientific guidelines explicitly state that decapitating turtles is inhumane and not recommended. "**Decapitation has been deemed unacceptable as a sole method of euthanasia for chelonians and is only acceptable when reptiles are rendered unconscious by other methods,**" says Dr. Wilbur Amand, Executive Director of The Association of Reptilian and Amphibian Veterinarians and Executive Director of American Academy of Veterinary Nutrition.

"Decapitation may sever the head from the body," explains Annie Lancaster, Director of Tortoise Aid in the US, "but **reptiles are capable of surviving prolonged periods of anoxia (absence of oxygen from the brain) for an HOUR (or more) after decapitation.**" Turtles will experience awareness and severe pain when slaughtered this way. Dr. Richard Gibson, Head Curator of Herpetology at the Zoological Society of London told CWI that "decapitation is an appalling way to kill any reptile, including turtles, and is only marginally better than the live disembowelment and butchery going on in the live food markets."

Turtle slaughter observed in Tesco store in Guangdong Province, 26 April 2008

Tesco staff caught a turtle and started to cut its head. The turtle pulled its head back into the shell, so staff cut the shell along the edge. The turtle broke loose and was caught again after about one minute. Staff then sliced the still living turtle in half separating the upper and lower part of its shell. Staff then put the dead turtle on the ice and attached a label. In another scene, Tesco staff cut the turtle's abdomen from tail to neck with a pair of scissors. The turtle extended its long neck and its extremities struggled. Tesco staff then added a traverse incision and pulled out the entrails.

CWI compared turtle slaughter methods in Tesco with those in a local Chinese market and found them to be no better.

Tesco has **no control over the behaviour of customers who wish to buy live turtles for home slaughter.** Common methods include live dismemberment, evisceration or boiling the animals alive.

Turtles **bound up tightly in plastic netting are mostly displayed on layers of ice**, which is inappropriate and painful for these sub-tropical to temperate, cold-blooded species. **Although Tesco acknowledged this fact a year ago, the practice continues** as before. Some turtles were held in aquaria with live fish where high water levels forced them to constantly struggle for air.



Turtle slaughter at local market



Turtle for sale, Tesco China



Turtles tied up in nets and displayed on ice

Welfare conditions on Chinese turtle farms and during transport are notoriously poor with overcrowding, injuries, disease and hygiene problems.

Bullfrogs are commonly skinned before being killed in China and **CWI documented Tesco staff skinning bullfrogs alive.** There is no question that this is utterly unacceptable and can not be considered humane under any circumstances.



American bullfrogs crowded into a plastic tub. Many of these animals carry wounds

Frog Slaughter observed in Tesco store in Guangdong Province, 27 April 2008

Tesco staff caught two frogs and cut off their heads with a cleaver. Decapitation of one frog is incomplete and the animal struggles. Tesco staff then peel the skin off both frogs, pack and label them.

CONSERVATION IMPACT

China's booming economy and one billion-plus population fuels the demise of turtle species across Asia and beyond. Two fifths (41%) of the world's tortoises and freshwater turtles and **three quarters of Asian species are threatened with extinction as a result of human consumption.**

China consumes some 20 million turtles a year. In 2000 alone, every week 25 tons entered the country from Sumatra. Despite legislation restricting trade in many species, enforcement is weak, and many internationally and nationally protected species still find their way onto Chinese plates. "The international trade in live turtles to supply the Chinese markets has **also decimated wild populations in many other countries including Vietnam, Cambodia, New**

Guinea, Indonesia, India, and even the USA," says Kevin Buley from The European Association of Zoos' & Aquaria's (EAZA) Shellshock Turtle & Tortoise Conservation Campaign. Under this initiative almost 200 European zoos and aquaria are "reaching tens of millions of zoo visitors with vital messages about the current conservation plight of these ancient creatures."

Although Tesco argues that turtles sold in its stores are farmed, Chinese **Tesco staff told CWI that some of the turtles on sale are wild caught.** Turtle farming too damages wild populations and the environment. Research by Dr. Shi Haitao and colleagues from the Chinese Academy of Sciences confirmed that commercial farming threatens wild turtle populations. Any "gains can only be considered temporary," says Dr Shi, "with a permanent cost to wild Chinese turtles. **In the long term turtle farms serve no function beyond generating profit for a few entrepreneurs. The existence of an enormous, largely unregulated, turtle-farming industry creates additional and serious challenges for turtle conservation.**" In addition "there is a cultural demand for wild-caught game. This is especially true in China, where the nutritional properties of wild animals are promulgated by the practitioners of traditional medicine and deeply ingrained in the national psyche. Consequently, **wild-caught turtles fetch significantly higher prices than farm-raised turtles, and no amount of captive breeding will decrease the desire for wild turtles.**"



Chinese turtle farm



Crated turtles at food market



Turtles piled high at a Chinese food market

Prof. Darrell Senneke, one of the world's leading authorities on tortoises and turtles and Director of the World Chelonian Trust told CWI: "When an adult turtle is removed from the wild, it is not just that turtle that is being removed, but also the reproductive potential of that animal over a breeding life that may exceed 50 years. As a result, removal of **even a few adults from a population can result in the decline and eventual loss of the entire population.**" He adds that according to research by Dr Brad Compton the removal of just two animals a year from a population of 100 adults would extirpate the population in less than 80 years."

In a statement to CWI, EAZA's Kevin Buley said "There has been hope in recent years that the massive expansion of turtle farms within China (an industry now estimated to be worth over \$1 billion each year), would help curb the demand for wild turtle collection. However, whilst there has been a significant shift from wild caught turtles to farmed turtles in the trade, it is becoming clear that the turtle farms themselves still have a huge demand for wild caught specimens to ensure that the fecundity of the animals in the farms remains high." Wild turtles are also caught to set up new breeding facilities. **"Farms that don't regularly 'top-up' their breeding stock with fresh wild caught animals, very quickly notice a drop-off in egg and hatchling production. ... The growth of turtle farms, the regional and international trade and now, the availability of these non-domesticated animals in large supermarket franchises, is having a catastrophic effect on the remaining fragile wild populations of many species."**

Dr. Richard Gibson, Head Curator of Herpetology at the Zoological Society of London and Head of EAZA's Shellshock Campaign notes that farmed "turtles are over-crowded, species are hybridised and escape to the wild, and high levels of parasites and other water-borne pollutants are discharged into the environment. ... The trade in farmed turtles can also provide a handy cover for illegal trade in wild turtles of species threatened and protected in the wild."

Last year, Tesco informed CWI that the species *Pelodiscus sinensis* is now the only softshell turtle for sale in its shops. But the International Red List of Endangered Species classifies *Pelodiscus sinensis* as Vulnerable due to harvesting for food. This means the species faces a high risk of extinction in the medium-term.

Selling softshell turtles for food supports a destructive market that is fuelling a global extinction crisis. Any action that endorses or participates in this devastating trade pushes wild turtles one step closer to extinction. Tesco should not be involved in the extermination of these imperilled animals.

HUMAN HEALTH CONCERNS

Turtles are likely to carry salmonella, which can cause serious health problems and death in humans. Prof. Frederick Frye, a leading authority on turtle medicine and biology, told CWI **"the opportunities for zoonotic infections, particularly chelonian - to - human salmonellosis should be sufficient reason to discourage the trade in these animals.** The sale of frogs is linked to the growing amphibian pandemic of chytridiomycosis.