



Care for the Wild International

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News Release

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SCIENTISTS OPPOSE TESCO TURTLE SALES IN CHINA

Ahead of tomorrow's Tesco AGM, Care for the Wild International together with 27 leading veterinary, scientific and chelonian authorities and professional bodies wrote to Tesco CEO Sir Terry Leahy urging him to stop selling turtles and bullfrogs in China on conservation and animal welfare grounds.

"After assessing information provided by CWI last June," says Dr Maas, "Tesco removed hardshell turtles from sale because it is not possible to access the animal's head for decapitation without breaking the shell. Tesco also added crushing the skull to decapitation as a slaughter method to reduce time to death."

CWI investigators who visited 32 Chinese Tesco stores in April and May discovered that staff do not adhere to Tesco's new slaughter policies. In 12 stores where CWI witnessed slaughter firsthand, staff continued to kill turtles by decapitation alone or by evisceration. CWI also found large numbers of disembowelled turtles with intact heads for sale.

"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 The American Academy of Veterinary Nutrition. "Reptiles are capable of surviving prolonged periods of anoxia (absence of oxygen from the brain) for an HOUR (or more) after decapitation," explains Tortoise Aid Director, Annie Lancaster. Turtles killed this way will experience awareness and severe pain. According to Dr. Richard Gibson, Head Curator of Herpetology at the Zoological Society of London, decapitation "is only marginally better than the live disembowelment and butchery going on in the live food markets."

In a Tesco store in China's Guangdong Province, CWI observed how staff caught a turtle and started to cut its head. "The turtle pulled back into the shell," says Dr Maas, "so staff cut the shell along the edge. The turtle broke loose and was caught again after about a minute. Staff then sliced the still living turtle in half, separating the upper and lower part of its shell. 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 transverse incision and pulled out the entrails." CWI also saw Tesco staff skinning bullfrogs alive. "This unacceptable and can not be considered humane under any circumstances."

Bound up tightly in plastic netting, live turtles are mostly displayed on ice, which is inappropriate and causes pain. CWI says that although Tesco acknowledged this fact a year ago, the practice continues.

Three quarters of Asian tortoises and freshwater turtles are threatened with extinction as a result of human consumption. China alone consumes some 20 million turtles a year. "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.

Although Tesco claims all its turtles are farmed, staff told CWI that some turtles on sale were wild caught. Research by Dr. Shi Haitao from the Chinese Academy of Sciences confirmed that farming threatens wild populations. "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 "wild-caught turtles fetch significantly higher prices than farm-

raised turtles, and no amount of captive breeding will decrease the desire for wild turtles. It is unlikely that the black market turtle farms could ever be controlled.”

Prof. Darrell Senneke, a leading authority 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.”

“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,” says Dr. Buley. “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.” “The cruellest aspect of turtle sales by companies such as Tesco, says reptile expert Prof. Harvey Lillywhite, “is the extinction of populations and species worldwide”.

Tesco’s Corporate Responsibility Policy states the company is “committed to conducting business in an ethical and socially responsible manner” and uses “up-to-date knowledge of research, ethics, scientific facts and legislation to ensure this happens”. “Twelve months ago CWI provided Tesco with all the science and expert opinions needed to reach a decision” says Dr Maas. “But Tesco refuses to accept facts. Undeterred by science and its own policies, Tesco insists on maintaining an untenable position. This is irresponsible and unreasonable, and no amount of denial, corporate spin and excuses will change that.” ENDS

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Notes to editors:

1. Report, images and footage available at:
<http://www.careforthewild.com/>
2. Care for the Wild International (CWI)
CWI is a conservation and animal welfare charity that funds practical projects around the world. We make areas safe from poachers, rehabilitate sick or injured animals and provide sanctuary for those who cannot return to the wild. We also act as a global voice for wildlife through research, education and advocacy, and expose animal cruelty and wildlife crime. - www.careforthewild.com