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EDITORIAL

China's Tiger Farms

One of the most intractable problems in species protection is the Chinese appetite for traditional medicines. That appetite has only grown as China has grown more prosperous. Despite bans — by China's government and international agreements — on the sales of some materials and the near extinction of many of the animals used in traditional medicine, prices for animal parts continue to rise, and so do the incentives for poachers and sellers.

As The Times [reported recently](#), one particularly horrifying practice is Chinese tiger farms, which supply pelts, worth up to \$20,000 apiece, and tiger bones used in medicines and aphrodisiacs. These farms are thinly masked as efforts at tiger conservation. In reality, their purpose is to raise tigers to be butchered and consumed.

The tiger farms also do nothing to take pressure off the dwindling population of wild tigers. Chinese consumers believe parts from wild tigers have greater medicinal potency. In China, there are only some 20 wild tigers left. And Chinese demand — heightened by the farms and the beginning of the Year of the Tiger — has caused sharply increased poaching in India, which has only about 1,400 wild tigers left.

The Chinese government seems to be doing little or nothing to shut down tiger farms or punish those who buy or sell tiger parts. And it has made no attempt to persuade Chinese consumers that tiger parts have no real medicinal value.

Unless China does both — shuts down the tiger trade and finds a way to alter consumers' tastes — the wild tiger is almost surely doomed.

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