



Ti Map's Story

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A rescued Moon Bear completes his long journey home to Animal Asia's Vietnam Bear Rescue



IN July 2000, Animals Asia Foundation, a Hong Kong based charity, signed an agreement with the Chinese government to remove 500 endangered Asian black bears from bile farms in Sichuan province and work towards ending the practice. Today, the China Bear Rescue has placed 219 previously farmed moon bears at a Sanctuary in Chengdu, and is helping to advance the concept of animal welfare in China.

Bile Bears, sometimes called **Battery Bears**, are bears kept in captivity to harvest their bile, a digestive fluid produced by the liver and stored in the gall bladder. The bear species most commonly farmed for bile is the Asiatic black bear (*Ursus thibetanus*), although the sun bear (*Helarctos malayanus*) and the brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) are also used to collect bile. Both the Asiatic black bear and the sun bear are listed as Vulnerable on the Red List of Threatened Animals.

Bear bile has been used in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) for thousands of years. Modern investigations showed that it has a wide range of pharmacological actions with little toxicological side effect and the pure compounds have been used for curing hepatic and biliary disorders for decades. However, extensive consumption of bear bile made bears endangered species. In the 1980's, bear farming was established in China to extract bear bile from living bears with "Free-dripping Fistula Technique". Bear farming is extremely inhumane and many bears died of illness such as chronic infections and liver cancer. Efforts are now given by non-governmental organizations, mass media and Chinese government to end bear farming ultimately. At the same time, systematic research has to be done to find an alternative for bear bile.

A team of Animals Asia veterinarians and Bear workers are in Vietnam's seaside town of Phan Thiet sweating in the 30°C heat as they carry a 150kg moon bear down four flights of stairs.

This is a bear rescue, and a historical one at that. The beautiful Ti Map – whose name means Chubby Mouse – is the last bile farmed bear in the province, making Ninh Thuan only the second province in Vietnam to become Bear Bile Farm Free.

Once anaesthetised, Ti Map (Moon Bear) is taken out of his cage for the first time in 14 years. All his life he has periodically been anaesthetised with inappropriate drugs, and had a needle jabbed repeatedly in to his gall bladder so that his bile could be removed as an ingredient in traditional medicine. He has never known the natural world, just a lifetime of isolation and suffering in a small cage.



Despite being made illegal in 2002, the practice of farming bears for their bile persists in Vietnam with around 2,000 bears believed to be held on bear farms throughout the country.

Ti Map is one of the lucky ones. After so many years of bear bile farming, his owner Mr Viet had a change of heart.

“We believe that Animals Asia will take care of him much better than we can. We now know that bear bile farming is wrong,” he said.



Sun Bear

Now, Ti Map is finally on his way to Animals Asia's Vietnam Bear Rescue Centre in Tam Dao, just 40km north of the capital Hanoi. Here, he will live alongside 110 other moon and sun bears rescued from the cruel bear bile industry living out the second half of his life in open near-natural enclosures that encourage the bears' natural instincts.

As Ti Map is taken out of the cage, there is sudden concern – Ti Map has stopped breathing. As the senior vet on the rescue I order a stop and fortunately am able to resuscitate him with a blow to his chest.

Seven of us begin again to move Ti Map down the stairs to conduct a health check, but once we reach the second floor it becomes apparent that Ti Map has stopped breathing again, and I could not feel a pulse. This reaction to these anaesthetic drugs is very unusual, but luckily I managed to resuscitate Ti Map a second time. Once we had carried him down the remaining flights to the ground floor, I take the decision to abandon the health check, and reverse the routine small dose of anaesthetic.

Ti Map was loaded onto a truck and once awake, we began the 1,700km, three-day road trip up the coast of Vietnam back to our sanctuary in Tam Dao.

The next time we were preparing to perform a health check on Ti Map, the conditions were infinitely better. We were back in our well-equipped bear sanctuary in Tam Dao and were delighted to have a visiting anaesthesiologist from Edinburgh University on hand.

As expected, again Ti Map reacted very strongly to the anaesthetic drugs entering a deep plane of anaesthesia much faster than is typical for moon bears.

Throughout the health check we tried to keep him under light anaesthesia, and monitored him very carefully, to minimise any risk.



Conclusion

Bile farmed bears typically have severe issues with their gallbladders, and sure enough, Ti Map's appeared thick-walled on the ultrasound. At this point we were able to quickly and accurately test Ti Map's blood in using an Abaxis HM5 CBC Analyzer. The CBC reading allowed us to rule out an acute infection, implying that thick walled gallbladder is indeed a chronic reaction to 14 years of bear bile extraction.

In future it may be necessary to remove the gall bladder, but for now we will wait until Ti Map's next health check to ascertain any changes in his situation.

Thankfully, the rest of Ti Map's health check revealed no major abnormalities.

The speed and accuracy of the HM5 is extremely useful when carrying out health checks on the 111 bears at our Vietnam Bear Rescue Centre.

The on-site analyzer provides us fast and accurate automated haematology results allowing us to detect hidden infections or blood disorders, which would otherwise be difficult to diagnose in bears. In the case of Ti Map, it gave us an extra avenue with which to interpret our ultrasound findings.



Running Ti Map's blood.

The HM5 CBC analyzer has also proven to be very useful in the small animal clinic, which we run for staff and neighbourhood pets when owners participate in our de-sexing programme. By diagnosing diseases and monitoring the recovery process of these dog and cat patients, the HM5 has become a tool which the wider community can benefit from too.

