

Wildlife consumption rampant in HCM City

HCM CITY — Well educated, middle-aged people and public employees tend to consume wild animal products more frequently than their less educated brethren as well as people of other age groups, a survey has found.

Nearly 51 per cent of 4,062 local residents polled said they have used wild animal products, consuming them as food, drink and health supplements, or using them for ornamental purposes.

Results of the survey, which focused on consumption of wild animal products in HCM City, was released on Monday.

More than 48.4 per cent of people who used wild animal products had consumed them at least three times a year; 75.3 per cent had eaten game meat and 12.4 per cent had taken the products mixed with alcohol.

Wild animal health products such as bear bile and tiger bone gelatine were taken by 7.5 per cent of people, while 1.5 per cent had used fashion and ornamental products made from wild animals.

Nearly 3 per cent have kept them as pets.

Snakes, wild boars, stags, deer, wild chicken, spot-billed duck, lesser coucal, porcupine, bear, civet, weasel, fresh water turtle, python, and monitor lizard are among wild animal species that are most widely consumed.

The survey showed that consumption of wild life products differed according to gender, age, education level, profession and status.

More men than women use wild animal products. Among the male respondents, 63.6 per cent stated they had used wild animal products, compared with 38.4 per cent of females.

The middle-aged group between 36 and 45 years of age were the most frequent consumers of wild animal products, accounting for 59.1 per cent; followed by the 46-55 years old segment with 51.6 per cent and the 26-35 years old segment with 51.1 per cent.

People with higher education were also more likely to have used wild animal products.

Among the survey respondents, nearly 57 per cent of postgraduates and 53 per cent of university graduates said they had consumed wild animal products.

Employees of State and private companies are the most likely consumers of wild animal products, accounting for 60 per cent of the respondents, followed by the worker group at 53.7 per cent and government officials with 52.4 per cent.

The survey also revealed that more managerial staff (60.7) than regular staff used wild animal products.

Peer pressure

The consumption of wild animal products is also related to social pressure, curiosity and emerging habits and tastes.

Most people said they had the products because they were invited by others and/or wanted to try something new. Some also felt the food was tastier and better for health.

Others said they brought business partners as a prestige symbol.

The number of people who use wild animal products are likely to increase in the near future as nearly half of surveyed respondents confirmed they would eat game meat, including 25.9 per cent of people who had never used wild animal products before, if they were invited. Only 13.1 per cent responded that they did not know whether or not they would consume wild animal products.

However, 62.5 per cent of people who have used wild animal products said they were tilling to use alternative products.

The survey also polled 3,562 secondary school students in HCM City, showing that parents of students or adults in their families strongly influenced the consumption of wild animal products among students.

Among the polled students, 28.2 per cent had used wild animal products with males and females accounting for 31.4 per cent and 25.8 per cent respectively.

Students are likely to consume game meat when they travel with their families or on family events such as birthday and family gatherings or if their parents buy it for them whenever they like, the survey found.

Only 6.7 per cent of surveyed students admitted they would consume wild animal products while 56.9 per cent said they did not know or had not made a decision.

Only 35 per cent of surveyed students stated that they would not use wild animal products in the future.

"The survey helps us to understand the consumption of wild animal products in HCM City. This is a firm foundation to design effective conservation initiatives in order to prevent illegal wild animal trading and consumption," said Hoang Duc Huy, deputy head of HCM City University of Natural Sciences' Faculty of Biology.

Do Thi Thanh Huyen, wildlife education manager with the non-profit organisation Wildlife At Risk (WAR), said effective education programmes for young generations will be a priority for her organisation as they sought a sustainable solution to this problem.

The survey was conducted between August 2010 and April 2011 by WAR in co-ordination with the university. — VNS