

Asia 'wakes up' to animal welfare

Caring for animals is not just a Western whim - millions of people in Asian countries think animal welfare is important, a Mori poll has discovered.

The International Fund for Animal Welfare (Ifaw) asked people in China, South Korea and Vietnam about their views on the treatment of animals.

It found 90% believed "we have a moral duty to minimise suffering."

Further still, the vast majority of those questioned would like to see legislation to protect animals.

These findings have been presented in London this week, at an international conference held by the Compassion in World Farming Trust (CIWF Trust).

Stark contrast

Although Asian nations are frequently criticised for their cruelty, Ifaw found their people's feelings about animal welfare are broadly similar to the UK's - a country often touted as "animal loving".

Prior to its London conference, the CIWF Trust commissioned Mori to ask the British public the same questions about animals. It found that 91% of British adults identified a "moral duty" to minimise animal suffering, and 92% said the law should reflect this.

Never before in China have questions regarding the treatment of animals attracted so much attention

Dr Peter Li, Chinese academic

However, the strong pro-animal stance of the Chinese, Vietnamese and South Korean public is in stark contrast to their government's actions on the issue, Ifaw says.

There is only minimal welfare legislation in South Korea and in Vietnam there is none at all. Although China does have wildlife protection laws, Beijing decided in 2004 to delay introducing legislation protecting all animals.

Both Ifaw and the CIWF Trust hope their poll findings will help persuade Asian governments that new laws to protect animals would be welcomed by the public.

"Ifaw's education work in China has increased the public's concern for animals and the anti-cruelty movement here is growing fast," said Dr Aster Zhang of Ifaw-Beijing.

Several Chinese delegates are attending the CIWF Trust conference, which aims to improve the relationship between humans and animals around the world.

"Never before in China have questions regarding the treatment of animals attracted so much attention," said Dr Peter Li of the University of Houston-Downtown, US.

"Since the late 90s Chinese scholars have by their own initiative been engaged in heated discussion and recent high profile animal cruelty cases have helped turn this into a subject of public discussion."

The conference, From Darwin To Dawkins: The science And Implications Of Animal Sentience, is being held at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre in London on 17-18 March 2005.

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