

First Asiatic black bear survey in China

WSPA is supporting the first survey of Asiatic black bears in Sichuan province, central China, to see how poaching is affecting their numbers.

The numbers of Asiatic black bears in the province has not previously been known. The project aims to establish their numbers and then assess the effects of poaching on the bear population.

Why are bears hunted?

Bear bile is widely used in Traditional Medicine. Bears are often poached for their gall bladders and other organs to be used as medicine.

Findings

The survey team, from Chinese and US universities, are using systematic sampling methods across the province. They are collecting data on the detection or non-detection of bears through:

- interviews with local people
- sign surveys – mainly claw marks on trees

Initial findings from the interviews indicate that:

- 33 per cent of people thought there was bear poaching in their area
- 62 per cent believed the bear population was decreasing
- 46 per cent believed that poaching accounted for the decrease.

The survey is due to be completed by the end of 2007.

The survey will provide an accurate range map for black bears in Sichuan province that can be used for future population monitoring. It will also identify specific areas where bear populations are at greatest risk of being wiped out, highlighting where conservation efforts can be focused.

