



Ending bear bile farming in South Korea



Foreword

World Animal Protection has been protecting the world's bears for more than 30 years. We end the suffering and exploitation of bears in captivity and work to ensure wild bears stay in the wild, where they belong.

Bears are one of the world's most iconic wild animals. Yet throughout Asia, tens of thousands of bears endure extreme suffering during their lives so their gallbladder bile can be used in traditional medicine. The bear bile industry is one of the worst examples of wild animal exploitation in the world today.

Bears kept in bile facilities are often forced to endure painful bile extraction. Many are kept in tiny cages in appalling conditions for their whole lives. All are denied their basic welfare needs. They are not free to roam in their natural environment or express any of their natural behaviours, as they would in the wild.

In South Korea, the bear bile industry is not a traditional practice. It began around 40 years ago with the first imports of bears for exploitation on farms. Unlike farmed bears in other countries, their bile is not regularly extracted. Bears are kept until they are at least 10 years old when they are slaughtered, and their gallbladders are removed for traditional medicines. This is despite the readily available, cruelty-free bear bile alternatives that have been tested and endorsed by respected experts in the traditional medicine sector.

Working together

World Animal Protection and Green Korea United (GKU) have been working to end the South Korean bear bile industry since 2003. Together we have moved the people of South Korea to support an end to the industry and lobby for better protection for bears.

In 2014, we managed a landmark agreement between the government of South Korea and Bear Farmers Association of South Korea to develop a voluntary exit plan from the industry for bear farmers. This included a sterilisation programme, which involved encouraging bear farmers to have their captive bears sterilised, to stop the breeding of new bears for the industry.

The sterilisation programme was completed in 2016 and was a significant step forward in ending this cruel industry for good.

This success would not have been possible without the participation and support of multiple stakeholders. These include the South Korean government, the Ministry of Environment, GKU, the Bear Farmers Association, technical experts and the people of South Korea.

Foreword

To prevent the bear bile industry from resurfacing, together with GKU, we moved the South Korean National Assembly to pass the Amendment Bill to the Wildlife Protection and Management Act in April 2021. This introduced stricter penalties for aggravated wildlife offences, including illegal bear breeding. Concurrently, we also lobbied for the government to provide funds to build a shelter to house illegally-bred bears.

In January 2022, in a major leap forward, the South Korean Ministry of Environment signed a joint agreement with the Bear Farmers Association and key local animal protection organisations, including GKU. The agreement set out a commitment to prohibit bear bile farming and bile extraction from 1 January 2026. The agreement sends a clear and positive signal that the cruel practice of bear bile farming is no longer acceptable in a modern country. We would like to acknowledge all those who have been involved in reaching this milestone in ending the exploitation of bears in the bear bile industry.

In view of the progress made to date, World Animal Protection concluded its partnership with GKU at the end of December 2021. Both GKU and World Animal Protection are confident that conditions have been met to bring about a meaningful end to bear farming in the country and ensure that the bear bile industry does not resume in South Korea. GKU will continue to work independently to ensure that the bear bile industry comes to a concrete end.

Across the world, World Animal Protection is working to help ensure that all wild animals being cruelly exploited for commercial gain today, from bears to lions to dolphins, will be the last generation to suffer for profit. We would like to thank GKU for their hard work in helping us move the South Korean government to make this the 'Last Generation' of bears to be cruelly exploited for commercial purposes.

We hope the steps taken in South Korea will be an example that other Asian countries will follow to bring an end to the cruel farming of bears for their bile.

Kate Nustedt

Global Wildlife Director
World Animal Protection

It is time to end 40 years of bear bile farming in South Korea

In 2022, the South Korean Government, the Bear Farmers Association, and civic groups, including Green Korea United (GKU), publicly pledged to end the South Korean bear bile industry. After a long and successful campaign, from 1 January 2026, bear bile farming and bile extraction will be banned, and the public and private sectors have pledged to protect the remaining bears. This marks the beginning of the end of South Korea's 40-year bear bile farming industry, which began in 1981.

This proves GKU and World Animal Protection's 20-year campaign has had a real positive impact on the lives of South Korea's bears. By monitoring bear bile farms, we assessed the situation and raised public awareness of the plight of farmed bears. In 2010, the government, bear farmers, experts, and non-governmental organisations formed a 'public-private committee' to work together to solve the problem of breeding bears for their bile. We drafted the 'Special Act for Farmed Bear Management' to clarify the responsibility of the government and raised our voice for the protection of farmed bears.

A breeding ban was imposed through a sterilisation programme and nearly 1,000 farmed bears were sterilised between 2014 and 2016. The DNA of farmed bears was analysed and recorded and a DNA database for farmed bears was built for the government to systematically manage and monitor illegal activities. Despite the sterilisation programme, our monitoring uncovered the illegal breeding and farming of bears leading to government prosecution, and contributing to the National Assembly passing a bill that increased penalties. We continuously raised the need for a facility where the national government can protect the remaining farmed bears, including illegally bred bears, which led to a plan for its construction and the approval of a budget.

There are remaining challenges that need to be addressed before South Korea's bear bile industry can come to a complete end. Breeding bears for their bile must be prohibited by law. The national government must do its part to protect the remaining farmed bears and reach an agreement with the bear farmers. Illegal breeding, which occurs on a yearly basis, must be rooted out.

World Animal Protection's exemplary global campaigning and support of GKU's goals helped to bring South Korea's bear bile industry one step closer to being a thing of the past. We will not stop our efforts to end the tragedy of breeding bears for their bear bile and to give the 313 remaining farmed bears a chance of a new life.

It is time to end South Korea's 40-year history of bear breeding, for good.

Gyu-seok Jeong

Secretary General
Green Korea United

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Lasting change for bears

Summary

Since the 1980s, thousands of bears have been held captive in bear bile facilities in a number of Asian countries, including South Korea, China, Vietnam, Laos and Myanmar. Their bile is turned into powders, capsules and ointments used in traditional medicines. Today, there are approximately 23,000 bears suffering in the bear bile industry across Asia.

Bear farming for bile or gallbladder extraction is legal in South Korea and China. Although Vietnam banned bile extraction in 2005, more than 220 bears are still captive there, and the illegal trade in bile and gall bladders continues.

Within South Korea it is still legal to breed bears in captivity and slaughter them at 10 years old, for the sole purpose of selling bile and gallbladders. However, extracting bile from live bears is illegal.

South Korea was one of the first countries to exploit captive bears for their bile. In 1981, the government encouraged rural farmers to farm captive bears for export as an income source. However, export was banned from 1985 after intervention by animal welfare and protection organisations. But the breeding continued and almost 1,400 bears had been bred in captivity by the mid-2000s.

In 1999, bear farming-related legislation was enacted by the South Korean government. The Wildlife Protection and Hunting Act stipulated criteria for the management of captive bears aged 24 years old and above. The Act allowed the slaughter

and extraction of gallbladders from bears above this age for economic reasons. In 2005, the legal age limit for slaughtering bears for their gallbladder was reduced to 10 years old.

Green Korea United (GKU) has worked to end bear bile farming since 2000; raising awareness, surveying the public, and monitoring the violation of laws such as the sale and advertising of illegal products. It has worked with the government to take action against such violations and ran lobbying campaigns to pass a Special Act for Farmed Bear Management.

The formation of the Committee for Farmed Bear Management in 2010 (renamed the Bear Sterilisation Task Force Committee in 2014) was crucial in ending bear bile farming in South Korea. It comprised the Bear Farmers Association, the Ministry of Environment, and other key stakeholders, including veterinarians, NGOs and academics. Its purpose was to collaborate and find solutions to end bear bile farming.

Thanks to the work of this task force, the government introduced the sterilisation programme in 2014 to ensure no new bears enter the bear bile farming industry. This programme was completed in 2016.

The conclusion of the sterilisation programme was a major step forward in ending the bear bile farming industry. It was the culmination of more than a decade's work, moving people, businesses, government and organisations to support this programme.

Lasting change for bears

However, while the agreement to sterilise bears remains voluntary and it is legal to breed and slaughter bears for their bile, the work must continue. GKU will continue to lobby for lasting change for bears in South Korea.

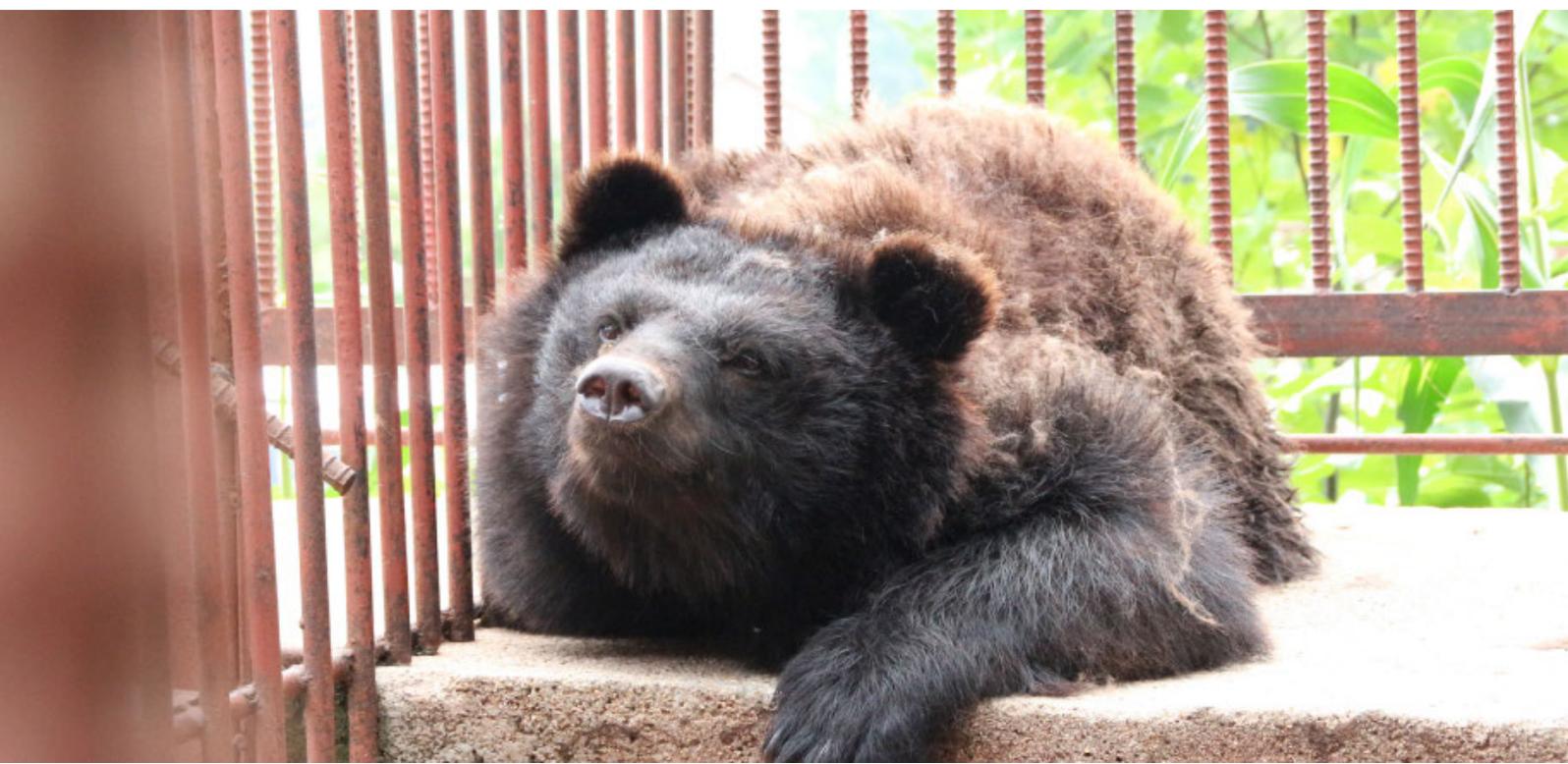
GKU is ensuring that the outcomes of the sterilisation programme are monitored and enforced, and the welfare of more than 300 sterilised bears in captivity is considered, while ensuring no new bears end up in captivity for their bile.

Despite the sterilisation programme, illegal breeding of converted exhibition bears (see page 21) continues, as discovered during inspections by GKU and the authorities. In response, World Animal Protection and GKU lobbied the government to increase penalties for illegal breeding to ensure that no new bears entered the bear bile industry from other sources. After several years of lobbying, on 30 April 2021, the South Korean National Assembly passed an Amendment Bill to the Wildlife Protection and Management Act. This introduced stricter penalties for aggravated wildlife offences, including illegally breeding endangered species such as bears for their bile. The Amendment Bill sent a clear signal that such offences will not be tolerated and those found guilty will be severely punished.

In parallel, we also lobbied the government to approve a budget for the construction of a high welfare shelter to house illegally-bred animals. In 2021, the South Korean government approved the budget for the construction of an animal shelter to house 49 illegally-bred animals, including bears, in the Gurye-Gun municipality. The government is also planning to build another wildlife sanctuary in Seocheon-gun, which will house around 70 bears.

The 26th of January 2022 was a landmark day for our campaign. After tirelessly campaigning for almost 20 years, the South Korean Ministry of Environment signed a joint agreement with the Bear Farmers Association and key local animal protection organisations including GKU to end bear bile farming. The agreement sets out a commitment to prohibit bear bile farming and bile extraction from 1 January 2026. The signatories also agreed to cooperate to humanely conserve and care for the remaining live bears in the interim.

With the agreement, and the necessary legislative framework due to be put in place, the practice of cruelly exploiting bears as commodities will be abolished once and for all, ending the 40-year industry.



Tracking an industry

The history of bear bile farming in South Korea

The bear bile farming industry in South Korea originated more than 35 years ago. During this time, significant milestones have moved us closer to the eventual end of the industry.

1981: Importing, breeding and exporting bears is permitted in South Korea as an income generator for rural farmers. A total of 496 bears are imported between 1981 and 1985.

1985: Amid mounting public pressure, importing bears is banned. But bears are still allowed to be kept on farms. The government legalises gallbladder extraction from slaughtered bears, a solution to make up for the losses experienced by bear owners.

1993: South Korea signs the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). This legally-binding agreement ensures that the international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival, providing countries with a legal framework to ensure this¹.

1999: Jurisdiction over farmed bear management is transferred from the Korea Forest Service to the Ministry of Environment.

The Wildlife Protection and Hunting Act introduces management criteria for farmed bears aged 24 years or older. This allows bear farmers to slaughter bears aged 24 years or older for their gallbladders.

2003: GKU, with World Animal Protection (then WSPA) support, investigates the conditions on bear bile farms in China and South Korea. Traditional medicine markets, online markets, and other aspects of the trade are also investigated.

2004: GKU publishes the results of the 2003 investigation: The Report on the Actual Conditions of Bear Bile Trade. The report highlights the illegal trade in bear bile and related products in South Korea and neighbouring countries. The findings are presented to the government.

2005: The Wildlife Protection Act is enacted and enforced. It replaces the Wildlife Protection and Hunting Act. This allows for more consistent monitoring of bear farms by the government.

The legal age limit on slaughtering bears for their gallbladder is reduced to 10 years, where the legal limit was previously 24 years. There are still no plans to end the industry.

The Ministry of Environment develops Guidelines for Farmed Bear Management. These guidelines allow for regular inspection of bear farms by regional Ministry of Environment offices.

GKU, with World Animal Protection support, commissions and publishes two surveys: Report on the National Public Survey into Bear Bile Farming and Bear Gallbladder, followed by the Report on the Traditional Medicine Doctor Survey into Bear Bile Farming and Bear Gallbladder. The first survey showed that 87.1% of Koreans were against bear farming for the purpose of bile extraction.

2007: A GKU survey of bear farmers shows that 80% agree with abolishing bear farming, and will cooperate with the government for reasonable compensation.

¹ What is CITES? Retrieved 14 June 2023, from: <https://cites.org/eng/disc/what.php>

Tracking an industry

2009: GKU releases the Report on the Alternative Medicine to Bear Bile, written by the Korea Association of Herbology. It is endorsed by the Association of Korean Medicine.

2010: GKU releases Research on the Options to Abolish the Bear Farming Policy, conducted by Professor Gwangyu Lee of Kangwon National University.

GKU and MP Heedeok Hong press the government to introduce a Special Act for Farmed Bear Management. The Act features a breeding ban (sterilisation) with compensation to bear farmers, the purchase of farmed bears by the government and a management and handling plan for bears. It is not passed due to high budgetary requirements.

The Ministry of Environment forms a Farmed Bear Management Committee and calls for meetings to find a solution to bear bile farming issues.

2011: The survey Public Awareness and Perception on Bear Gall Bladder and Farmed Bears is commissioned by GKU, with World Animal Protection support, and shows 89.5% of surveyed South Koreans are against bear farming for the purpose of bile extraction, indicating continued strong public sentiment against the practice.

2012: The Ministry of Environment commissions Chungnam National University to conduct Research into the Actual Conditions of Farmed Bears and Management Options, and a census of farmed bears. The researchers find 53 bear farms - holding 998 captive bears - in South Korea.

The World Conservation Congress Assembly adopts a recommendation on farmed bears in Asia including South Korea. The motion (WCC-2012-Rec-139 - Bear farming in Asia, with particular reference to the conservation of wild populations) recognises South Korea is currently considering how to end bear bile farming, and is moving towards the end of farming. Furthermore, the recommendation encourages South Korea to continue its efforts to end bear farming.

2013: MP Hana Jang, from the then Democratic United Party, proposes the bill for Special Act for Farmed Bear Management. It is supported by 16 MPs.

World Animal Protection visits South Korea and releases an international statement to urge the government to end bear bile farming. A national budget is confirmed for the sterilisation programme of farmed bears. The budget is 5,440,000,000 KRW (approximately US\$4.8 million) over three years.

2014-2016: The Ministry of Environment conducts the sterilisation programme of farmed bears and develops a DNA database of bears, to monitor the industry.

A public poll on Consumer Demand for Bear Gall Bladder in South Korea is commissioned by GKU, with World Animal Protection support, and shows 86.3% of South Koreans disagree with breeding and the slaughter of bears for their gallbladders.

2020-2021: The South Korean government approves the budget for the design and construction of an animal shelter to house illegally-bred animals, including bears, in Gurye-Gun municipality to accommodate 49 bears, and pledges to build another wildlife sanctuary in Seocheon-gun, to house around 70 bears.

On 30 April 2021, the South Korean National Assembly passes an Amendment Bill to the Wildlife Protection and Management Act with increased penalties for aggravated wildlife offences, including illegally breeding endangered species such as bears for their bile.

2022: The South Korean Ministry of Environment signs a joint agreement with the Bear Farmers Association and key animal welfare organisations (GKU, Moon Bear Project, Korean Animal Welfare Association and Korea Animal Rights Advocates) to end bear bile farming and bear bile extraction by 1 January 2026.

Working partners

World Animal Protection and Green Korea United

World Animal Protection and GKU joined forces in 2003 to end the South Korean bear bile farming industry, working together until December 2021.

World Animal Protection concluded its partnership with GKU at the end of December 2021 after conditions were met to bring about a meaningful end to bear farming in South Korea and ensure that the bear bile industry does not resume. This was confirmed by the government's announcement in January 2022 that it would end bear bile farming by the end of 1 January 2026. GKU will continue work independently to ensure that the bear bile industry comes to a concrete end.

World Animal Protection is a global animal protection organisation. For more than 50 years it has moved the world to protect animals in the wild, in communities, on farms and those caught up in disasters. It is committed to ending the cruel and unnecessary exploitation of bears for their bile and parts, to ensure bears are spared a lifetime suffering in captivity, and remain in the wild where they belong.

GKU was founded in 1991. It campaigns for the protection of wildlife and for the conservation of ecologically significant areas in South Korea, including the Baekdudaegan mountain range, the Demilitarized Zone, and seas and coastline. It also works for a nuclear free world and for measures to prevent climate change.

World Animal Protection provided expertise, and technical and financial support to GKU to end the bear bile farming industry in South Korea. This included advice on strategic direction, joint lobbying activities, and funding and support for surveys and activities to raise awareness in South Korea. World Animal Protection also worked with government, stakeholders and supporters around the world to build international support to end the industry.

Our successful campaign in South Korea will serve as an example to build momentum and encourage other countries in Asia to end the cruel bear bile industry.



Promoting alternatives to bear bile

The suffering of bears in the bear bile industry is not only cruel, but is entirely unnecessary, with viable synthetic and herbal alternatives readily available.

Dehydrated bear gall bladder and bear bile are commonly used in traditional Asian medicines. They are believed by some traditional medicine practitioners to be effective in treating various diseases related to the liver, and to remove toxic substances by cooling down fevers.²

However, a 2005 survey, Korean Traditional Medicine Practitioners Poll on Farmed bears and Bear Gallbladders, commissioned by GKU and World Animal Protection, demonstrated that 93.3% of Korean traditional medicine practitioners believed that people simply take bear bile without prescription because of blind faith in its efficacy. The surveyed TM practitioners also indicated they had concerns about the safety and efficacy of using bear bile from farmed bears, with most

Korean traditional medicine doctors having prescribed alternatives to bear bile.

During 2009, GKU commissioned the Korea Association of Herbology to carry out research into alternative medicines to bear bile. Some highlights and findings of the Report on the Alternative Medicine to Bear Bile are:

- there are alternative medicines, including those synthesised from herbs, that are effective replacements for bear bile.
- the Korea Association of Herbology strongly recommends choosing alternative medicines to bear bile.

Additionally, the Association of Korean Medicine supported the resulting research report. It stated there was enough clear evidence to end the practice of farming endangered species, including bears.

² Seung, J Y, *Ungok Herbalogy*, (Searimje, 2004), pp. 251-254

Herbology: Coedited by herbology professors of the nationwide oriental medicine universities, (Yeongrimsa, 2007), pp. 257-258



Raising public awareness and support

The support of local people has been paramount in building a movement towards ending bear bile farming in South Korea. Since 2005, a series of campaigns, events and activities have raised awareness, in turn reducing consumer demand and increasing support for ending the suffering of bears for their bile.

2005

Cage Dreams of Freedom event

On National Bear Day, the event in Seoul, Bears in the Cage Dream of Freedom, demonstrated to the public the cruel and unnatural conditions suffered by moon bears on bear bile farms in South Korea. The Naksan Theatre Company of Hanseong University, performed a short play to show the realities of captive farmed bears on bear farms, while an exhibit demonstrated the experience of being caged. Petitions urging the government to end the bear bile farming industry in South Korea were signed, and members of the public were given a chance to write postcards to friends with the message 'Give farmed bears freedom!'.



2006

Parade for bears

A National Bear Day parade in Seoul, using actors performing as bears, highlighted the cruelty endured by farmed bears. A total of 1,400 signatures were collected in a petition to end the industry. People were encouraged to send petition postcards to the Minister of Environment and government agencies, calling for an end to bear bile farming.



Raising public awareness and support

2007

Sorry Bears concert

Musicians and television celebrities showed their support for ending bear bile farming at the Sorry Bears concert held at Konkuk University, Seoul. Guest artists included Sane Kang, Badaksori, Changgeun Park, Windy City, Jinkyu Ryu and Sangeun Lee. The aim of the concert was to raise public awareness of the plight of bears being taken from the wild.

WSPA · 녹색연합 2007 공사육 정책 폐지 운동
liberty

녹색콘서트
곰아미안해

때 : 2007년 11월 11일 (일) 오후 4시
곳 : 건국대학교 새천년관 대공연장

출연 : 강산에, 박재홍, 박정간, 오지혜(사육), 한디서티, 풍간구, 이상환

야생의 곰은 멸종위기종에...
몸담아문에 실험에서 사용되는 곰은 1400여 마리,
곰의 살처를 빼앗고 곰의 자유를 빼앗았던 우리의 고백,
"곰아 미안해..."
이제 우리는 멸종위기의 곰을 위한 자유의 노래를 부릅니다,
"미나, 뭘, 셋 우리의 노래가 오이면 커다란 울림이 있습니다."

2008

We Love Bears Concert

We Love Bears at Central Park in Bundang, featured pop-up stands and other activities to inspire people to say 'no' to bear farming. Visitors were encouraged to write petition postcards to the Ministry of Environment. Exhibitions highlighted the plight of bears and alternative medicines to bear bile. Local guest artists included Girls Generation, Shiny, Crying Nut, Minwoo Lee, Geonmo Kim, Crown J & Inyeoung Seo, Booga Kings, Yeongeun Seo, Yeol Ryu and Marionette.

Green Concert
We Love Bears

“우리 안의 곰,
자유의 날개를 달다”
Green Concert 'We ♥ Bears'

녹색연합은 곰 사육 문제를 널리 알리고 우리나라 곰 사육 종단을 위해
2008년 11월 15일 분당 중앙공원 야외공연장에서 Green Concert 'We ♥ Bears'를 개최합니다.
곰 사육 캠페인에 뜻을 모은 여러 연예인들이 함께 하나의 목소리를 내는 자리로서
무료로 진행되는 콘서트이니 함께 하고 싶으신 분들의 많은 참여 부탁드립니다.

· 행사명 Green Concert 'We ♥ Bears' · 행사 장소 분당 중앙공원 야외공연장
· 행사 일시 2008년 11월 15일 (토) 19:00 - 21:00 · 행사 구성 친서형사 / 공식행사 / 콘서트
· 주최 녹색연합 · 후원 WSPA · SBS
· 협찬 MAMA · ANP · DIGITAL CUBE

· 행사에 참여하여 복지에 선의인 관계로 사정한 10부 등 개인이 사용할 양어를 꼭 돌려받으시기 바랍니다.
· 콘서트 당일 행사장이 복지의인 관계로 대중교통을 이용하주시기 바랍니다.

Raising public awareness and support

2009

Luggage tags

Information on the bear bile industry was printed on luggage tags for Asiana Airlines, in collaboration with the travel magazine AB-Road. The information on the luggage tags explained that it is illegal to bring bear bile and bear by-products into South Korea from abroad. It also encouraged passengers to sign a petition to end bear bile farming in South Korea.



Bus shelter advertisements

Across Seoul, 110 bus shelters displayed advertisements raising awareness of bear bile farming and calling for an end to the industry.



2010

Special Exhibition at the National Assembly

A special exhibition was held at the National Assembly to support the bill for the Special Act for Farmed Bear Management. The Act highlighted solutions to ending the industry, including a breeding ban through sterilisation with compensation for farmers, and the development of a plan by the government for the purchase of all farmed bears and their subsequent management and handling.



Raising public awareness and support

2012

Raising awareness at World Conservation Congress

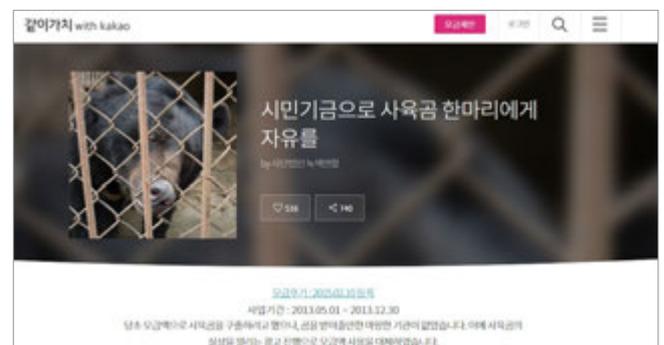
At the World Conservation Congress in Jeju, GKU activities focused on raising awareness of bear bile farming in South Korea. The Congress acknowledged South Korea's continued efforts towards ending bear farming, and the efforts of member countries to prevent the numbers of captive bears in existing farms from increasing.



2013

Farmed bear rescue campaign

A campaign was launched focusing on Bodami the bear, a captive bear in South Korea, raising awareness and donations. The funds, with the support of donors, were used on advertisements in 70 bus and taxi shelters around Seoul, to highlight the suffering of farmed bears being exploited for their bile.



Developing and supporting legislation

Three bills for special laws to end the bear bile farming industry were proposed by Members of Parliament at the National Assembly over the course of this campaign, including provision to end the breeding of farmed bears:

- Special Act for Farmed Bear Management (2010 and 2013)
- Special Act on Farmed Bear Breeding Ban, Preservation and Alteration in the Purpose of Use Thereof (2013).

GKU directly worked on drafting two of these bills with Members of Parliament who proposed the bills at the National Assembly. A legal framework, together with financial support, was essential in developing a practical solution to end the industry.

To achieve this, GKU pressed for a special law to be introduced making bear bile farming illegal. The law would prohibit the breeding of farmed bears and include an option for the government to purchase and manage captive bears on bear farms.

GKU developed the draft bill for the Special Act for Farmed Bear Management 2010, with MP Heedeok Hong. The bill included a ban on breeding farmed bears, through a sterilisation programme, compensation for bear farmers, and government purchase and management of all captive farmed bears. The bill also included a ban on using bears for other purposes, such as for exhibition, and transferring them between farms.

The Ministry of Environment did not pass the bill due to the significant budget needed to purchase all of the bears. It ordered a census of all farmed bears to be conducted first.

Next steps

In 2013, two separate bills on a Special Act for Farmed Bear Management were proposed again. Both bills focused on ending bear bile farming, but presented two different options to reach this outcome.

MP Hana Jang's bill amended the earlier bill proposed by MP Heedeok Hong. This bill included the ban on breeding and the purchase and management of bears on the farms by the government.

MP Bonghong Choi presented a bill which also required the government to purchase bears on farms, but with the condition that only bears with conservation value would be purchased. It was felt that this would address the budgetary limitations. However, while this bill lessened the government's financial burden it still left a number of bears suffering on farms, delaying the end of the bear bile farming industry.

Although the bills were expected to pass, they were unsuccessful due to the inability of MPs to reach an agreement on key aspects, including budget requirements. There was also a perception that the government was taking responsibility for private property - the bears.

A full list of MPs who supported and agreed on the special bill is provided in Appendix 2.

Forming a public-private committee

The critical turning point in the campaign to end bear bile farming was the formation of a public-private committee in 2010.

This was formed after the proposal for the bill on Special Act for Farmed Bear Management, and provided an open forum for stakeholders, including the Bear Farmers Association, the Ministry of Environment, and experts from veterinary, government and academic fields, to facilitate discussion on specific laws.

During committee discussions, the government conceded some responsibility for the introduction of the bear bile industry in South Korea. It also agreed to conduct an official investigation to inform future options to move towards solutions to end the industry.

The Ministry of Environment, in 2012, undertook research, titled Research into the Actual Conditions of Farmed Bears and their Management Options. This was the first census undertaken of farmed bears and bear farms in South Korea, providing critical and precise statistics on the industry.



Management options

The results formed the basis for discussions on farmed bear management and suggested the options below to find a solution to end the industry.

- A. Introduction of a breeding ban and reducing the bear population over time.
- B. Introduction of a breeding ban and a phased purchase of bears based on the age of bears.
- C. Purchasing land to provide facilities and accommodation for all the bears. Then purchasing all bears from bear farms to move to this land, with subsequent management of the bears handled by national government.
- D. a) The government purchasing older bears and bears in ill health (100 in total) from bear farms and donating these for academic purposes (including genetic study). These bears would be housed in national or public institutes with appropriate spaces and land. Institutes named included the National Science Museum, museums of natural history or universities with departments of veterinary medicine/animal resources.

b) The government purchasing or transferring 200 bears in good health and condition (for treatment if necessary) for release on appropriate land that would be run as a bear park. Interested local governments would run this bear park.

Forming a public-private committee

E. Suggestion from bear farmers on the premise of a breeding ban (two separate options within)

a) Reduce the age for slaughter of bears for their bile to five years old, and provide the bear farmers with compensation for each bear sterilised. Resulting in all bears aged five or older being sterilised. Additionally, the government would pay for the cost of feed for bears aged between one and four years.

b) The government would provide the cost of feed for bears aged between one and 10 years, with the minimum age of slaughter remaining at 10 years. All bears aged 10 or older would be sterilised, and when these bears were slaughtered, the government would provide bear farmers with financial aid.

F. Establishing a foundation to manage a bear sanctuary (with land and facilities provided by the government)

The option in which the government purchased and managed all the farmed bears, fulfilled the objective of ending bear bile farming. It also fed into growing national support for the end of the bear farming industry. Bear farmers also supported this as their preferred option. It allowed for the eradication of the bear bile farming industry in the most effective and speedy manner, with the government taking control of the issue and the solution.

However, after discussions with relevant ministries, the government expressed the opinion that “it was not appropriate for the state to compensate for the value of private property as bear farming is a profit-making business”.

Consequently, the government chose the option of a breeding ban through a sterilisation programme, rather than a purchase of all bears. It was not the quickest resolution, but it was the first time resources and budget were allocated to a concrete solution that would result in ending bear bile farming.

The long-term rationale of the sterilisation programme was to ensure no new bears would enter the industry through breeding. It also anticipated that law enforcement would be stringent and no new bears would enter the bile industry in South Korea through importation.

The combination of lobbying and legislative work, support from members of parliament, increased public awareness and a growing national sentiment against the industry, including reduced consumer demand for bear bile, were all essential components in creating momentum for this programme to be accepted by all major stakeholders.

Sterilising farmed bears

The sterilisation programme commenced in 2014, with all bile bears sterilised by the end of 2016.

The programme was implemented by South Korea's Ministry of Environment, which allocated a total budget of 54,400,000,000 KRW (approximately US\$4.8 million) for the programme.

The public-private committee was renamed the Bear Sterilisation Task Force Committee in 2014, and oversaw the sterilisation programme. It ensured all stakeholders were updated on developments, and given the opportunity to make comment if necessary. Such involvement ensured that any emerging issues were identified and addressed as soon as possible.

The Ministry of Environment conducted the sterilisation programme. A total of 967 farmed bears were sterilised by 2017: 389 bears were sterilised in 2014; 557 in 2015 and 21 in 2016.

The government also built a DNA database of farmed bears. At the time of sterilisation, the DNA of each bear was collected, analysed and registered on the database. Birth date, alteration in the purpose of use, transfer, acquisition, deaths, etc. of farmed bears are recorded. Recording the DNA of each bear allows clear monitoring to prevent any illegal trade, trafficking, slaughter or breeding.

With all farmed bears now sterilised, the sterilisation programme ultimately signalled the end of the captive breeding of bears. It ensures the bears confined in facilities in South Korea will be the last ones to suffer in captivity for their bile – while no new bears will enter the industry.

The sterilisation programme was a highly significant turning point and milestone in the history of bear bile farming.

But the agreement is still voluntary, and it remains legal to breed and slaughter bears for their bile. Until 2021, World Animal Protection continued to lobby for lasting change for bears in South Korea to ensure that the outcomes of the sterilisation programme are monitored and enforced – and the government keeps its commitment to stop bears from being converted back for use for their bile, ensuring that no new bears end up in suffering in captivity for their bile.

Below: Bear being sterilised.



Moving forward

Although the sterilisation programme was completed, at the time of writing, 313 bears remain in their cages until they are slaughtered for their gallbladders.

It is still legal to slaughter farmed bears for their gall bladder once they have reached 10 years or older.

However, there are currently bears over the age of 10 years old still suffering in cages, due to the decrease in demand for bear bile. Signatories to the MOU in January 2022 agreed to cooperate to humanely conserve and care for the remaining live bears in the interim period before the bear bile industry is abolished for good as of 1 January 2026.

Furthermore, a reduction in bear bile demand will increase the financial burden on bear farmers. It could prevent investment in, or improvement of, bear farming facilities by these farmers. It is more than 40 years since bears were first imported into South Korea, and facilities on bear farms are outdated and in poor condition.

If the conditions on farms continue to deteriorate, there is the risk of accidents, such as bears escaping from cages, and a risk bears will endure worse living conditions. The government must now consistently and meticulously monitor bear farms and consider budgetary investments to improve the conditions to ensure the best welfare conditions for the bears.

Converting farmed bears to exhibition bears

The sterilisation programme also gave rise to bears formerly farmed for their bile now being used to entertain the public. A total of 92 bears initially registered by bear owners to be used for their bear bile, were converted to 'exhibition' bears; essentially meaning bear farmers will alternatively make money from these bears by exhibiting them in zoo conditions.

While the government allowed some bears to be converted into exhibition bears, they have openly committed to preventing bear owners to reverse the use of these bears back to being exploited for their bile for traditional medicine purposes.

Exhibition bear owners need legal permission to breed them, and the government has stated this permission will not be granted, and anyone found breeding exhibition bears will be prosecuted.

A DNA database to improve monitoring of exhibition bears, similar to the database for bile bears, should be considered. This will help address loopholes in management and identify any violations of policy. GCU will continue to monitor the situation and work with the government to ensure the bear bile industry does not resume in South Korea.

Moving forward

Strengthening law enforcement

To tackle the problem of illegal breeding, World Animal Protection and GKU lobbied the government to pass an Amendment Bill to the Wildlife Protection and Management Act, which was finally passed in April 2021. The Bill introduced stricter penalties for aggravated wildlife offences, including illegal breeding of bears (converted exhibition bears) for their bile, sending a clear signal that such offences would not be tolerated and those found guilty of them would be severely punished.

Concurrently, we also lobbied the government to provide funds to build an animal welfare shelter to house illegally-bred bears. In 2021, the funds to build a shelter in Gurye-Gun municipality to house 49 bears were approved by the government. Construction of this shelter is scheduled to begin in the second half of 2023,

with completion in 2024. The government also agreed to build a second shelter in Seocheon-gun, that will house around 70 bears, with construction due to commence during the second half of 2023, and be completed by 2025. GKU will support and advise on the construction of the sanctuaries and how they should operate.

While the construction of the two sanctuaries housing around 120 bears is a positive development, 313 bile bears remain on 20 farms across South Korea at the time of writing. The government, along with NGOs, are working to find a solution to address the shortfall in sanctuary capacity and improve animal welfare conditions for the remaining bears on farms before the bear bile industry comes to an end by 1 January 2026.

Continuing cooperation and collaboration

Since its start in South Korea in 1981, bear bile farming has been an ever-evolving and complex situation. Unravelling these challenges would not have been possible without the support of individual stakeholders, many of whom have dedicated years to help reach a favourable resolution.

Only when all stakeholders - including the Bear Farmers Association, the Ministry of Environment, experts from the veterinary, government and academic fields, NGOs and others - joined together, did it become possible to resolve the challenges and reach a positive outcome for bears.

Cooperation and collaboration must continue following the landmark agreement reached in January 2022 between the South Korea government, the Farmers Association and local animal protection organisations to end the bear bile industry. The

agreement sets out a commitment to prohibit bear bile farming and bile extraction from 1 January 2026, and to humanely conserve and care for the remaining live bears in the interim.

Further to this development, the Special Act to Prohibit Bear Bile Farming was tabled at the National Assembly. GKU launched a national public petition collecting more than 21,500 signatures urging the National Assembly to pass the bill. GKU will continue to lobby the government to get the bill passed.

The pathway we have followed in South Korea has moved the South Korean government to make this the 'Last Generation' of bears to be cruelly exploited for commercial gain. Our vision is that it will serve as an example to move and inspire other countries to end bear bile farming and keep bears in the wild where they belong.

Appendix 1

Understanding bear bile farming in figures

Bear bile farming in South Korea



329



The natural monument designation number of Asiatic Black Bear

493

The number of the bears imported for the purpose of re-export between 1981 and 1985



Public survey

93.3%

A 2005 Korean Traditional Medicine Practitioners Poll on farmed bears and bear gall bladders, commissioned by GKU and World Animal Protection, demonstrated that 93.3% of Korean traditional medicine practitioners believed that people simply take bear bile without prescription because of blind faith in its efficacy.

95.6%

The public survey on bear bile in 2005 showed that 95.6% of Koreans 'have never purchased or intend to purchase bear bile.'

80%

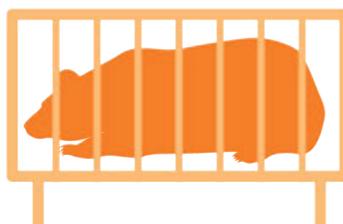
According to a survey of bear farmers in 2007, 80% of bear farmers agree with the policy to end bear bile farming, and would be willing to cooperate if appropriate compensation was offered.



44 The number of wild bears in Mt Jiri National Park



313 The number of farmed bears at the end of 2022



Appendix 2

Members of Parliament who supported and agreed on special bills related to bear farming

Below is a list of MPs who supported and agreed on the special bills described in the text.

Law for which bill was proposed	Special Act for Farmed Bear Management proposed by MP Heedeok Hong (2010)	Special Act for Farmed Bear Management proposed by MP Hana Jang (2013)	Special Act on Farmed Bear Breeding Ban, Preservation and Alteration in the Purpose of Use Thereof (2013) proposed by MP Bonghong Choi (2013)
Signatories	Hee-deok Hong	Ha-na Jang	Bong-hong Choi
	Ki-kab Kang	Kyoung-hyeob Kim	Hui-su Jeong
	Seong-cheon Kang	Gwang-jin Kim	Se-yeon Kim
	Jeong-sook Gwak	Tae-won Kim	Yeong-sun Ju
	Young-gil Gwon	In-soon Nam	Yeong-geun Song
	Sang-hee Kim	Won-seok Park	Han-pyo Kim
	Jaeyoon Kim	Ki-woon Bae	Ui-jin Shin
	Tae-won Kim	Sang-jeong Shim	Jong-jin Lee
	Seon-sook Park	Soo-mi Eun	Ul-dong Kim
	Eun-soo Park	Soon-ok Jeon	Moon-heon Jeong
	Won-il Yu	Seong-ho Jeong	Chang-sik Park
	Myoung-soo Lee	Jin-hu Jeong	Tae-won Kim
	Mi-kyoung Lee	Myoung-sook Han	Jae-yeong Lee
	Jeong-hee Lee	Jeong-ae Han	Jasmine Lee
	Han-seong Lee	Young-pyo Hong	
	Dong-young Cheong	Jong-hak Hong	
	Mun-soon Choi		
	Young-pyo Hong		

