

Whistle-blowing campaign to ban the trade of cats for human consumption without an animal protection law August 2010

United with animal protection communities in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, Green Beagle (an animal welfare group in China) held an event revealing the darkness of the cat-eating trade, and discussed the possibility of banning cat-consumption within the existing law.



Every day before dawn in Hutong near the Jiangsu Restaurant in Shanghai, scooters begin to fill the streets, usually with full bags on their backseats. Only cat rescuers who frequent there are able to recognise that the bags contain live cats on route to being killed and eaten.

When trading with restaurants, the bags are dumped on the ground with no regard for the cats' welfare. When the deal is done, the bags are opened to expose blood-stained wooden cages with cats huddled together in fear. The cages are then loaded into trucks and transported to Guangdong Province.

This trade has been going on for twenty years. Both stray and owned cats are collected from all the major cities around China, such as Shanghai, Nanjing, Tianjin and Wuhan. They are then distributed to restaurants to be sold as food, predominantly in Guangzhou where the consumption of cat meat is most popular and highly regarded.

However, Guangzhou is not the only district to sell cat meat. In a large farmer's market in Shanghai, cat meat is sold as rabbit meat, or as lamb for kebabs. In the barbecue restaurant or sidewalk snack booth, cat meat soaked in sheep urine with cumin and pepper can totally confuse one's taste. Worse still, rumour has it well-known brands of ham sausages contain cat meat.

The tragedy is there are no Animal Protection laws in place in China to protect the welfare of non-wild animals, so cat rescuers have limited legal ammunition to help these cats. Not only do cat traders get away with mistreating the cats, but if stolen pets are rescued and reunited with their owners, cat traders cannot be prosecuted under the Property Law unless the cat is formally registered to that family, which is a rare occurrence.

The collection of stray and owned cats for cat meat is preferred over cat farming, due the high costs of the feline carnivorous diet, and the high risk of disease. As a result, cat meat has never been officially approved for consumption and is not regulated by the Ministry of Agriculture. Therefore, traders cannot apply for an Animal Quarantine Permit to ensure hygiene standards are met for human consumers, deeming it illegal for cats to be transported, slaughtered and served as food.

The Animal Quarantine Bureau of the Ministry of Agriculture recently requested to view permits held by three different cat dealers and found them all to be fake.

Thankfully, cat rescuers in Suzhou and Shanghai are able to take advantage of this, and have launched a whistle-blowing campaign, covering the Shanghai, Suzhou, and Wuxi areas. Without an Animal Protection Law in place, and with the loophole preventing cat rescuers to prosecute under the Property Law, they are able to prosecute for "forging official document and certificate", and sentence them to three to ten years in prison in accordance with the seriousness of the case.