

RED PANDA MARKET RESEARCH FINDINGS IN CHINA

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KEY points:

- Physical market surveys and interviews with local residents in Sichuan and Yunnan provinces found little evidence of any trade in Red Pandas.
- A one-off online survey of Chinese websites found only two Red Panda products offered for sale.
- Analysis of CITES trade data found discrepancies in the importer and exporter data reported by Chinese, US and German CITES Management Authorities.
- Based on seizure information, Sichuan province is the main centre for illegal trade in Red Pandas



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ABSTRACT

The Red Panda is a national second-class protected species in China—with both hunting and trade prohibited—and is listed in Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). It was upgraded to Endangered on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species in 2015. During April to May 2017, TRAFFIC conducted physical market surveys in areas close to Red Panda habitats (in Sichuan and Yunnan provinces) and an online market survey of Chinese websites. The results showed that only two dealers (one in the physical market and one in the online market) offered Red Panda products, which were allegedly obtained about 30 years ago (before the implementation of China's Wild Animal Protection Law). Most surveyed shopkeepers (60/65) had never heard of or had little knowledge of the species. Interviews with local residents, including members of minority ethnic groups who traditionally use Red Panda products, found that almost all were no longer interested in Red Panda products. According to CITES trade data, the international trade of live Red Pandas and parts between 2005 and 2015 was minimal. However, enforcement records revealed that some demand for Red Pandas as pets and for breeding purposes still exists in China. Ten seizure cases between 2005 and 2016 involved 35 live and seven dead Red Pandas. TRAFFIC encourages other range countries to look for evidence of Red Panda smuggling to China and to conduct similar market surveys to assess the extent of trade on Red Panda populations. Enforcement authorities in China also should increase their efforts to detect and deter illegal trade in Red Pandas.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors are grateful to WWF Germany for providing the funding for the work presented here from their collaboration with with the Association of Zoological Gardens (Verband der Zoologischen Gärten e.V., VdZ) of Germany, Austria and Switzerland. The authors express thanks to the reviewers from WWF and TRAFFIC: Xiao Yu, Yannick Kuehl, Fan Zhi Yong, Zhou Fei, Stefan Ziegler and Roland Melisch for their comments and advice on improving draft versions of this report, as well as Richard Thomas, Julie Gray and Sammi Li for their great support. The authors also thank the following external reviewers for their valuable feedback: Angela R. Glatston, Li Chun and Meng Xiuxiang.

INTRODUCTION

The Red Panda *Ailurus fulgens* is a mammal native to the eastern Himalayas and southwestern China. It has two sub-species. The nominate subspecies can be found in mountain forests of Nepal, northeastern India, Bhutan and northern Myanmar, while the eastern sub-species (*A. f. styani*) is distributed in southwestern China (Liu, 2009). The global wild population is an estimated 14,500–15,000 individuals (Glatston, 2011). Among them, around 6,000–7,000 occur in China, some 3,000–3,400 in Sichuan Province, roughly 50% of the Chinese population with 1,600–2,000 in Yunnan Province and a further 1,400–1,600 in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (Glatston *et al.*, 2015).



Figure 1. Red Panda distribution (Source: IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, 2015)

The Red Panda was upgraded to Endangered on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species in 2015, owing to the likelihood of its population having declined by 50% over the past two decades and the probability that it would continue to decline over the next three generations (about 18 years) (Glatston *et al.*, 2015). It is widely agreed that habitat loss and fragmentation are the major threats to the survival of Red Pandas. However, reports also show that poaching and trafficking are another threat, as demand exists in some areas from indigenous people (Liu, Zhang and Liu, 2011) who use Red Panda hides to manufacture hats and coats (Hu and Li, 1993). The utilization of Red Pandas in China is said to be mainly by Tibetans and the Yi ethnic minority group (Ziegler, Gebauer and Melisch, 2010), whose distribution greatly overlaps with that of the Red Panda.

The Red Panda was listed in CITES Appendix I in 1995—making its international commercial trade illegal except in exceptional licensed circumstances. As early as 1989, when China’s Wild Animal Protection Law was established, the Red Panda was listed as a national second-class protected species, prohibiting the sale and purchasing of Red Panda and its products. However, the current market dynamics and demand for Red Panda products in China is unknown.

This report aims to reveal the current trade status of Red Panda, in both physical and online markets, provide up-to-date information about the consumption attitudes of local people in Sichuan and Yunnan Provinces (including Tibetan areas) where the densest populations of Red Panda occur, as well as provide fundamental information through analysis of CITES trade data and law enforcement seizures in China.

RESULTS

1 Legal status

The Red Panda *Ailurus fulgens*, a CITES Appendix I species, is a national second-class protected species under China's Wild Animal Protection Law. In 2016, several articles specifically relating to Red Panda conservation were issued by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress under this law as follows:

Article 21: Hunting and killing of national protected animals is prohibited. For the purposes of scientific research, population regulation and other non-commercial cases, it is necessary to apply for a special permit for hunting national second-class protected species, such as the Red Panda, from provincial wildlife government departments;

Article 45: Those who violate Article 21 will be investigated for their criminal responsibilities;

Article 27: Selling, purchasing and using national protected wild animals and their products (including national first/second-class protected species) is prohibited. For the purposes of scientific research, captive breeding and other non-commercial uses, selling, purchasing and using national protected wildlife animals and their products must be approved in advance by provincial wildlife government departments and monitored through special marking systems;

Article 48: Those who violate Article 27, e.g. do not apply for special marking systems, will be fined, or their captive breeding licence, approval documents and special marks revoked, or can be investigated for their criminal responsibilities;

Article 31: Releasing online advertisements for selling, purchasing and using wild animal products is prohibited.

Article 51: those who violate Article 31 will be punished according to the Advertisement Law of the People's Republic of China.

2 Trade status

2.1 Physical market survey results

According to desk research, e.g. Han Zongxian (Han and Hu, 2004) and seizure information, Red Pandas are mainly distributed in the provinces of Sichuan, Yunnan and the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), particularly in Tianquan, Kangding, Luding, Yuexi, Xide, Mianning and Xichuang (Sichuan Province), and Shangri-la, Lijiang and Nujiang (Yunnan Province). In April and May 2017, TRAFFIC conducted physical market surveys in these hotspots in order to understand the trade in Red Panda products, with surveys focusing on product availability, types, prices, source, trader contacts, trader awareness of concerns over conservation of Red Pandas, and general market characteristics. The following types of shops were targeted: arts and crafts, pelt, and traditional clothing stores. A total of 65 relevant shops were surveyed, including 3 in Tianquan, 5 in Kangding, 6 in Luding, 10 in Yuexi, 1 in Xide, 9, 1 in Mianning, 9 in Xichuang, 8 in Lijiang and 22 in Shangri-la.

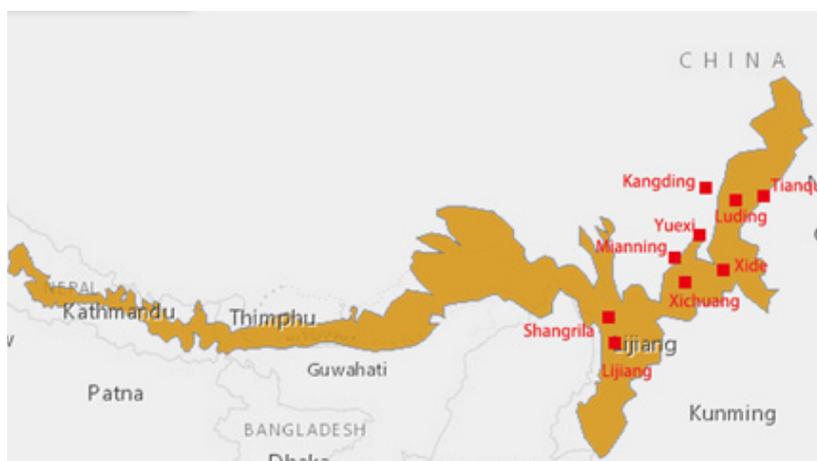


Figure 2. Physical market survey and local people interview locations

Amongst the 65 shops, Red Panda products were only found in one location, namely a shop at the peak of Yulong Snow Mountain in Lijiang, Yunnan Province. Several Red Panda pelt hats were available, along with traditional clothing of the region, for visitors to put on and be photographed with. A charge of CNY30 applied per customer. These pelt hats were also available for purchase, at CNY30,000 each. The trader claimed the hats were obtained 30–40 years previously, and that hunting of Red Pandas was now prohibited. The current price of Red Panda pelt clothing was CNY35,000–46,000.



Figure 3. Red Panda garments sold at the peak of Yulong Snow Mountain

Only five of the 65 traders had ever seen Red Pandas or their products, the others had never heard or had little knowledge of them. Two of the traders said that hats made of Red Panda pelt were traditionally only worn at weddings.

When asked where Red Panda products could be found, two traders indicated that they might be available in Shangri-la, while three traders thought they could be purchased in Kangding. Only five traders mentioned that Red Panda was a protected species, even if they did not know the species or its products.

2.2 Interview results

During physical market surveys, interviews with local people, including other shopkeepers, taxi drivers and tourism guides were conducted to gain a better understanding about poaching and illegal trade in Red Pandas.

A total of 82 local people were interviewed during this survey, including 21 in Tianquan, 4 in Kangding, 4 in Luding, 7 in Yuexi, 3 in Xide, 6 in Mianning, 2 in Xichuang, 31 in Lijiang and 4 in Shangri-la.

Of the 82 interviewees, 50 interviewees (61%) stated that they knew or had heard about this species, or had seen it in a zoo or on television. The 19 interviewees with some knowledge of Red Pandas said that they were a protected animal and warned the researcher not to purchase any. The remaining 32 interviewees (39%) had no knowledge about Red Pandas.

When TRAFFIC asked for the locations where Red Panda products might be available for sale, four interviewees mentioned the Old Town of Lijiang, while nine mentioned Shangri-la, and one suggested Kangding. However, TRAFFIC's physical market surveys in these locations did not reveal any Red Panda products.

Apparently this is because Red Panda products are no longer in fashion. Three interviewees said that younger generations do not like to wear animal fur products, such as Red Panda pelt hats or clothing. Older people might keep these items for use at certain festivals. Generally, however, these products are inherited within the family.

One interviewee mentioned that Tibetan people traditionally hunt and wear fur clothing, but in the past five years the local Tibetan Buddhism religious leader Lbaraki Khenpo Lodro (慈诚罗珠堪布) had called on followers to cease killing wildlife so many Tibetan people had given up hunting and wearing fur clothing.

2.3 Online survey results

Besides physical market surveys, TRAFFIC also carried out a one-off online survey in 36 Chinese-language e-commerce (C2C and B2C), forum and wholesale platforms (see list of platforms surveyed, with website links, in Annex 1).

There were only two incidences of trade in Red Panda products found during the online survey. One advertisement, on the website Wenwantuanxia, was offering a Red Panda tail for sale.¹ The product was posted for online auction on 16 November 2012, but the auction went unsold, and no further updates were provided. According to the auction description, the product could be exchanged face-to-face in Beijing, which suggests that the trader may be located in Beijing or its surrounds. The trader also provided contact information, including a QQ account and phone number. Both of these contact details no longer work.

Another incidence was a post on the Baidu Forum in which the user claimed to have a piece of clothing made of Red Panda pelt, and asked what the market price should be.² TRAFFIC successfully contacted the seller through the associated QQ account. After discussions on WeChat, the seller sent TRAFFIC a photo of the Red Panda pelt clothing with an asking price of CNY70,000. He claimed that the raw material was obtained from Dulongjiang, Yunnan Province in 1988, and was manufactured into a piece of clothing in 1998. Identification by experts at the Nanjing Forest Police College suggested that probably about seven individual pelts were used to craft the item. The trader also told TRAFFIC that Tibetan and Mongolian people (minorities in China) have a preference for pelt clothing. The trader claimed that he was currently working at the Yulong Snow Mountain. The information has been shared with the Forest Police for further investigation. No formal replies were given to TRAFFIC until now.



Figure 4. Red Panda tail posted online on Wenwantuanxia

3 CITES data

Analysis of trade data records from the UN Environment World Conservation Monitoring Centre's CITES Trade Database, pertaining to China's import and export of Red Panda in the period 2005–2015, was conducted.

China's data included records of four batches of Red Panda exports from China between 2005 and 2015, including:

- 1) One record in 2005, totaling 200 specimens exported to the USA for scientific purposes. The specimens were reported to be sourced from captive breeding;
- 2) One record in 2010, with one pre-Convention (pre-1976) specimen exported to South Korea for educational purposes;

¹ <http://bbs.wwtx.cn/forum.php?mod=viewthread&tid=2743151&highlight=%BE%C5%BD%DA>

² <https://zhidao.baidu.com/question/70443627.html>

- 3) One record in 2013 of four live Red Pandas, from captive breeding, exported to Japan as a zoo exchange;
- 4) One record in 2013, of a dead Red Panda (pre-Convention) exported to South Korea for exhibitions purposes.

In 2009, Germany reported the import of four Red Panda specimens that were bred in captivity from China for scientific purposes. However, China's export data did not include a record of this transaction. Another discrepancy in trade records was the export of Red Pandas from China to the USA in 2005, when 200 specimens were traded according to China's export data, but 75 specimens were recorded in the import data records of the USA.

Possible reasons for the discrepancies between importer and exporter data could be that reporting authorities in the exporting country had approved a given number of specimens to be traded, issued an export permit and reported this amount to the CITES Trade Database based on quantities stated in the permit. This number could subsequently differ from the actual traded quantity, as reported by the importing country. There is also the possibility that actual mis-reporting had occurred. Similarly, Germany may have reported to the CITES Trade Database their intent to import captive-bred Red Pandas from China for scientific purposes, but the actual trade transaction may never have occurred.

4 Seizure analysis

Seizure data indicate that law enforcement agencies in the Provinces of Sichuan, Yunnan, Shaanxi, Jiangsu and Liaoning made a total of 13 seizures involving Red Pandas in the period 2005–2017 (as of 15 November 2017), although this may only be a portion of actual seizures given that publicly available statistics often represent an incomplete record of actual wildlife seizure cases. A total of 35 live Red Pandas and 7 dead Red Pandas were confiscated in these seizures. Four of the seizures also involved other endangered species products in the same confiscated consignment.



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Figure 5. Rescued Red Panda in Chengdu, Sichuan Province, 12 January 2015



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Figure 6. Rescued Red Panda in Shenyang, Liaoning Province, 27 June 2012

Based on all available information about the known sources of Red Panda seizures, the confiscated Red Pandas in ten seizures (77%) were sourced from Sichuan Province. The illegal wildlife products in one seizure had been smuggled from Myanmar while the source was unclear in the remaining seizure cases. The confiscated Red Pandas were originally poached, transported and traded for the purpose of rearing as pets (n=7), for captive breeding (n=2), for commercial exhibition (n=2) and for wild meat (n=1). Moving Red Pandas within China often involves the use of long-distance public buses, private cars and motorbikes. Several seizures were a result of regular traffic checks on private transport or public buses, and in one instance the perpetrators had pretended that they were carrying “baby pigs” on-board.

The average purchase price of the animals in five of the seizures was CNY4,000 (n=5, the highest: CNY13,000; and the lowest: CNY1,200); and the selling prices (n=4) in markets ranged between CNY2,000, CNY3,500, CNY22,000 and CNY40,000. One trader had an online asking price of CNY22,000, with the product subsequently seized by the Shenyang Internet Police. The case with the highest price (CNY40,000) happened in July 2017. It may indicate that the price of Red Panda as pets is increasing.

Further information about five of the seizures was available as follows:

- In 2016, five convicted of involvement in the illegal purchase, transport and sale of four Red Pandas (hunted in Baoxing County, Ya’an City, Sichuan Province), five Snub-nosed Monkeys *Rhinopithecus roxellanae* and an Asiatic Black Bear (*Selenarctos thibetanus*) were sentenced to 3–12 years imprisonment;
- In 2014, a person convicted of the illegal purchase and transport of 11 Red Pandas (hunted in Muchuan County, Leshan City, Sichuan Province) was sentenced to 10.5 years imprisonment and a fine of CNY10,000;
- In 2014, a person convicted of the illegal hunting and transport of three Red Pandas (hunted in Leibo County, Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province) was sentenced to five years imprisonment and a fine of CNY5,000;
- In 2013, a person convicted in the illegal purchase and transport of one Red Panda (purchased in Luding County, Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province) was sentenced to one year imprisonment, with a two year probation, and a fine of CNY2,000;
- In 2005, three convicted of involvement in the illegal purchase, transport and sale of five Red Pandas (purchased in Mabian Yi Autonomous County, Leshan City, Sichuan Province) were sentenced to 8–10 years imprisonment, with fines between CNY15,000 and CNY30,000.



Figure 7. Map of five law enforcement seizures of Red Pandas

NEXT STEPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Only very few products were found during the specific physical and online surveys for Red Panda products. Furthermore, in recent years, when TRAFFIC has conducted market surveys for other threatened species products, e.g. Tiger/leopard skins and ivories, Red Panda pelts were only recorded once in Shangri-la, Yunnan Province in 2006.

In light of the low number of findings from the market surveys, NGOs in India and Nepal (e.g. WWF and TRAFFIC) need to be contacted to understand whether and why there is Red Panda smuggling from South Asia to China, particularly the Tibetan Autonomous Region;

- Surveys should also be conducted in other Red Panda range countries, including Nepal, India, Bhutan, and Myanmar to get an overall understanding of the market dynamics and analysis of trade routes;
- The physical and online survey results will be reported to relevant enforcement agencies for their follow-up;
- The Red Panda pelt hats and clothing that are owned/worn by old people in Sichuan and Yunnan Provinces should be registered by the provincial wildlife conservation departments in order to avoid these old products entering the market, which might stimulate demand for Red Panda products;
- Red Panda products should be forced to be registered by provincial wildlife conservation departments in China;
- Donors need to support new initiatives and projects to work with local wildlife management and enforcement departments in Sichuan, Yunnan and the Tibetan Autonomous Region, as well as religious communities to strengthen and maintain conservation efforts for Red Pandas;
- Wildlife trade analysts (e.g. TRAFFIC) need to investigate and cross-check the discrepancies between importer and exporter data with Chinese, US and German CITES Management Authorities to identify the reasons behind them and improve reporting protocols;
- The prosecution results for all reported seizures should be tracked to improve understanding of illegal hunting and trade in Red Pandas and their products in China.

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Annex 1: Online Platforms Surveyed for Red Panda Products

No.	Chinese name	English name	Link
1	中华古玩网	Zhonghua Guwan Wang	http://www.gucn.com/
2	盛世收藏网	Shenshi Shoucang Wang	http://www.sssc.cn/
3	文玩天下	Wenwantianxia	http://www.htchi.com/
4	雅昌艺术网论坛	Artron	http://bbs.artron.net/search.php
5	中国收藏热线	Zhongguo Shoucang Rexian	http://www.997788.com/
6	翰龙雅集	Hanlongyaji	http://bbs.hl365.net/
7	博宝艺术品商城	Bobao	http://shop.artxun.com/
8	华夏收藏网	Huaxia Shoucang Wang	http://www.mycollect.net/shop/
9	易玩中国网	Yiwan China	http://www.ewancn.com/
10	中国收藏网	Zhongguo Shoucang Wang	http://bbs.socang.com
11	汉唐收藏网	Hantang Shoucang Wang	http://www.htscw.com/
12	雅昌交艺网	Artebuy	http://www.artebuy.com/
13	上海文玩	Shanghai Wenwan	http://www.feiqu.com/forum.php
14	文玩天下商城	Wenwantianxia Shopping	http://shop.wwtx.cn/
15	中华收藏网	Zhonghua Shoucang Wang	http://www.shoucw.com/
16	中国古玩论坛(杂项区)	Zhongguo Guwan Forum	http://www.chineseantiques.com.cn
17	说宝	Shuobao	http://www.shuobao.com/
18	58同城	58 Tongcheng	http://bj.58.com/
19	拍拍网	Paipai	http://www.paipai.com/
20	淘宝	Taobao	http://www.taobao.com/
21	赶集网	Ganji	http://bj.ganji.com/
22	百姓网	Baixing	http://beijing.baixing.com/
23	易趣	Yiqu	http://www.eachnet.com/
24	阿里巴巴中国	Alibaba (China)	http://china.alibaba.com/
25	阿里巴巴国际	Alibaba (International)	http://www.alibaba.com/
26	文玩八方	Wenwanbafang	http://www.8fromchina.net/forum.php
27	文玩部落	Wenwanbuluo	http://www.haohetao.com/
28	壹号收藏	Yihao Shoucang	http://www.1shoucang.com/
29	藏龙网	Canglong	http://www.a9188.com/

30	龙之藏	Longzhicang	http://www.lzc369.com/forum.php
31	环球收藏网	Huanqiu Shoucang Wang	http://www.96hq.com/
32	中国皮毛信息网	China Fur and Feather Information Website	http://www.fur.com.cn/
33	辛集皮革城	Xinji Leatherware City	http://www.xinjipidu.com/
34	中国皮草网	China Leatherware Website	http://www.furcity.com/portal.php
35	海宁中国皮革城	Haining China Leatherware City	http://www.zgpgc.com/
36	百度贴吧	Baidu Forum	https://tieba.baidu.com

TRAFFIC, the wildlife trade monitoring network, is the leading non-governmental organization working globally on trade in wild animals and plants in the context of both biodiversity conservation and sustainable development.

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