

Killing for Recreation and Rugs

How Trophy hunting & Trade is threatening the Polar Bear



A Special Report for International Polar Bear Day, February 27, 2019

Campaign to Ban Trophy Hunting



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Conservation status

- Fewer than 25,000 polar bears are thought to remain in the wild, of which approximately two-thirds – or 16,000 – are in Canada.
- Polar bears are categorised as “vulnerable” by the IUCN in its Red List of endangered species. They are classed as being at risk of extinction largely because of climate change and the melting ice caps which has reduced their habitat and hunting grounds.
- In 2016, the IUCN Polar Bear Specialist Group estimated that of the 19 populations worldwide, 2 were in decline, and 5 were stable. There was not enough data for the remaining 11 groups.
- The polar bear is currently listed as an Appendix II Species under CITES, the law that regulates trade in endangered wildlife, but there have been calls from conservationists to place it in Appendix I - the highest category under the global agreement.
- The US and U.K. previously supported a ban on all international trade in polar bear parts along the lines of the ban on trade in elephant ivory. The US and Russian governments jointly put forward the proposal, arguing that poachers were using trophy hunting permits to launder their own illegal kills.
- The US also made importing polar bear products illegal, and included the species in the 2008 Endangered Species Act. However the US government subsequently reversed its position in 2016.
- Canada is the only country which permits commercial trade in polar bears.

Trophy Hunting

- As many as 5,001 polar bears have been killed by hunters for their trophies, skins and skulls.
- Other parts taken by trophy hunters include whole bodies, rugs, and gall bladders for so-called ‘traditional Asian medicines’.
- In the 10 year period to 1990, 154 trophies were taken. The figure jumped to 1177 in the following decade to 2000, and to 3163 in the 10 year period to 2010.
- In 2017 - the most recent year for which figures are available - polar bear trophy hunters came from China, the United States, and Britain to Canada, where 13 of the 19 known populations of polar bear remain.
- UK hunters have taken skins, bodies, skulls and mounted trophies of polar bears.
- Hunters also came from Austria, Estonia, Spain, Lithuania, Sweden, Ukraine, Brazil, Hong Kong, and the Czech Republic.

Trade to China

- There has been a significant increase in the trade of polar bear items to China.

- The first registered export to China was of a single skin in 1983. In 2012, the bodies of 96 polar bears as well as 225 skins and 115 trophies were shipped.
- China and Hong Kong have also imported live polar bears other than for zoos; galls and gall bladders; skulls; bones; carvings; claws; teeth; rugs; leather 'products'; and undefined 'specimens'.
- China is increasingly the main global buyer of polar bear fur, paying between \$5-6,000 for hides, rising up to \$20,000 for the highest quality. Polar bear rugs are in high demand on the black market, fetching up to \$17,000.
- A 2015 report for parties to the 1973 agreement on the conservation of polar bears showed a dramatic rise in the number of polar bear hides shipped from Canada to China.
- It reported that the growing Chinese market and rising auction prices had helped trigger an increase in polar bear hunting. The number of hides exported from Canada to China went from 266 to 400 between 2005-2013.

Conclusions:

- Polar bears currently face a number of very serious threats. The additional pressure from trophy hunting and trade can only compound existing problems.
- The extraordinary growth of polar bear fur and body parts exports to China is significant cause for concern.
- There is a lack of a trophy hunting tradition among the Chinese. The surge in numbers of 'trophies' going from Canada to China should be regarded with suspicion as it is possible this serves as a 'front' for trade for commercial and 'medicinal' purposes.
- Trophy hunting of polar bears, which is classed by CITES as a non-commercial 'recreational' activity, has no economic benefit therefore there are no reasons not to discontinue it from this perspective.
- There are no cultural traditions of hunting polar bears for recreation among indigenous communities, therefore there are no heritage reasons to support the continuation of polar bear trophy hunting.

Recommendations

- CBTH recommends that polar bears be upgraded to Appendix I of CITES at this year's COP, and that Appendix I be amended to ban all recreational or commercial hunting of polar bears with immediate effect.
- CBTH believes that previous proposals for a ban on all international trade in polar bear parts along the lines of the ban on trade in elephant ivory should be put back on the table, and that national governments should implement bans on the import of polar bears and polar bear parts.
- CBTH calls on Canada to cease to trade polar bears and to allow polar bear trophy hunting forthwith.

APPENDIX – TABLES

TABLE 1 – TOTAL POLAR BEAR HUNTING TROPHIES TAKEN

1981 – 15
1982 - 0
1983 - 37
1984 – 8
1985 – 0
1986 - 0
1987 - 6
1988 - 24
1989 – 33
1990 – 31

SUBTOTAL: 154

1991 –79 (+ 36.36kg meat)
1992 – 66
1993 – 63
1994 – 59
1995 – 102
1996 – 72
1997 – 227
1998 – 89
1999 – 252
2000 – 168

SUBTOTAL 1177

2001 – 256
2002 – 245
2003 – 226
2004 – 401
2005 – 303
2006 – 313
2007 – 556
2008 – 515
2009 – 159
2010 – 189

SUBTOTAL 3163

2011 – 48
2012 – 92
2013 – 60
2014 – 59
2015 - 136
2016 – 57
2017 – 55

SUBTOTAL 507

TOTAL: 5001

**TABLE 2 – TYPE OF POLAR BEAR BODY PARTS TAKEN BY TROPHY HUNTERS
(1981-2017)**

- Skins
- Skulls
- Trophies (ie shoulder mounted)
- Bodies
- Bones
- Teeth
- Claws
- Rugs
- Gall bladders
- meat

TABLE 3 – UK POLAR BEAR HUNTING TROPHY IMPORTS

1995 – 1 skin
1996 – 1 skin
1998 – 1 skin
2001 – 1 body, 1 skull
2002 – 2 skins
2003 – 1 bones, 1 skin, 1 skull
2007 – 1 skin
2010 – 1 skin, 1 skull
2014 – 1 trophy
2017 – 2 bodies, 1 skull

TABLE 4 – POLAR BEAR COMMERCIAL TRADE TO CHINA & FAR EAST

- 1978**
- Hong Kong: 6 skins
- 1979**
- Hong Kong: 6 skins
- 1980**
- Hong Kong: 2 skins

1981

- Taiwan: 123 'specimens'

1982

- Hong Kong: 1 skin

1983

- Taiwan: 100 specimens
- Hong Kong: 2 skins
- China: 1 skin

1984

- Taiwan: 2 skins
- Hong Kong: 4 skins

1985

- Hong Kong: 4 skins
- Taiwan: 1 skin

1986

- Hong Kong: 2 skins
- China: 2 skins

1987

- China: 1 skin
- Taiwan: 1 body, 2 skins

1988

- China: 1 live polar bear, 5 skins
- Taiwan: 1 live polar bear, 1 trophy

1989

- Hong Kong: 3 skins, 1 skull, 2 specimens
- Taiwan: 3 skins

1990

- Taiwan: 8 skins
- Hong Kong: 1 plates

1991

- Hong Kong: 10 live polar bears

1992

- No data

1993

- Taiwan: 1 trophy, 2 skins
- Hong Kong: 1 skin, 1 gall, 2 gall bladders

1994

- Taiwan: 2 skins
- Hong Kong: 2 skins, 2 trophies, 1 skull, 26 gall bladders, 1 body

1995

- Hong Kong: 1 skin

1996

- Taiwan: 1 skin
- Hong Kong: 4 skins
- China: 1 skin

1997

- Hong Kong: 1 skin, 1 trophy

1998

- China: 1 trophy, 1 skin

1999

- China: 1 body

2000

- China: 1 skin, 1 specimen
- Hong Kong: 1 skin

2001

- China: 1 skin, 12 live polar bears

2002

- China: 1 body, 2 skins, 1 trophy, 2 live polar bears
- Hong Kong: 2 skins

2003

- China: 1 skin, 1 set claws, 2 live polar bears

2004

- China: 1 live polar bear, 4 skins
- Hong Kong: 1 carvings, 1 set claws

2005

- China: 13 skins, 1 carvings, 1 live polar bear, 2 specimens, 1 trophy
- Taiwan: 1 skin

2006

- China: 2 bodies, 23 skins, 3 specimens, 2 trophies, 2 live polar bears
- Hong Kong: 1 skin
- Taiwan: 1 carvings, 1 set claws

2007

- China: 2 bodies, 44 skins
- Hong Kong: 1 skin

2008

- China: 6 bodies, 43 skins, 6 specimens, 1 trophy
- Hong Kong: 3 skins

2009

- China: 11 bodies, 94 skins, 6 specimens, 30 trophies, 1 body
- Hong Kong: 2 skins

2010

- China: 40 bodies, 203 skins, 10 skin pieces, 1 skull, 43 specimens
- Hong Kong: 2 skins

2011

- China: 44 bodies, 149 skins, 20 skin pieces, 2 skulls, 7 specimens, 123 trophies, 5 live polar bears
- Hong Kong: 30 specimens
- Taiwan: 1 skin

2012

- China: 96 bodies, 225 skins, 10 specimens, 115 trophies, 1 live polar bear
- Hong Kong: 1 body, 3 skins

2013

- China: 1 live polar bear, 134 bodies, 193 skins, 14 specimens
- Hong Kong: 2 skins

2014

- China: 70 bodies, 1 set bones, 17 garments, 1 leather products, 87 skins, 1 skulls, 9 specimens, 78 trophies

2015

- China: 47 bodies, 1 set bones, 83 rugs, 175 skins, 8 skulls, 7 specimens, 63 trophies, 1 fur products (large)
- Taiwan: 1 body

2016

- China: 61 bodies, 1 extract, 57 rugs, 17 skins, 3 skulls, 1 trophy
- Hong Kong: 2 rugs, 1 skin
- Taiwan: 3 bodies

2017

- China: 48 bodies, 6 sets bones, 30 rugs, 69 skins, 18 skulls, 540 specimens, 942 teeth;
- Hong Kong: 3 bodies, 1 set bones, 9 skins, 1 skull, 1 rug

(note: numbers for live animals exclude those for zoos)

SOURCES:

The data in these tables is taken from the CITES database of the UN Environment Programme/World Conservation Monitoring Centre. Additional data on trade is taken from: 'Review and Analysis of Canadian trade in polar bears 2005-2014, A Report prepared for the Parties to the 1973 Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears', Ernest Cooper, March 2015