

## 《吃珍贵濒危野生动物将受刑事处罚》

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Those who eat endangered species at restaurants might receive criminal punishment, according to a draft judicial interpretation being reviewed this week by China's top legislature.

If a person buys rare or endangered wild animals to eat or for other illegal purposes and is aware of the animal's protected status, they will be punished in line with the Criminal Law, the draft says.

It is scheduled to be reviewed from Monday to Thursday by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress.

It's the first time concrete rules have been proposed to prohibit the eating of endangered wildlife. In some parts of China, eating wildlife is a centuries-old tradition.

The current Criminal Law stipulates that those who capture, kill, buy, transport or sell rare and endangered species and products made from the animals can be sentenced to no less than 10 years in prison in serious cases.

It also specifies that the sale of dishes containing protected wildlife at restaurants is illegal.

However, the stipulation is too vague on whether eating endangered animals is legal or not, said Li Shouwei, deputy head of the criminal law division under the Commission for Legislative Affairs of the NPC Standing Committee.

According to the interpretation, paying for dishes made with protected wildlife at restaurants could be deemed as "buying products made from rare and endangered species", Li said at a news briefing on Friday, adding that buying protected wildlife on the black market also falls into this category.

The draft interpretation is aimed at lowering market demand for endangered wildlife and raising public awareness of protecting rare wild species, he said.

"No trade, no killing," he added.

The Chinese government has put 420 animal species, including the panda and the armadillo-resembling pangolin, on a national protection list, making it illegal to hunt, slaughter or sell animals on the list.

Effective since 1998, the Law on the Protection of Wildlife lays down the basic principles for the conservation of rare and endangered species. It is scheduled to be revised within five years, according to the work plan released

last year by the NPC Standing Committee.

More than 130 lawmakers have raised suggestions on wildlife protection, including forbidding the eating of endangered species and enhancing punishment for the illegal trade in protected wildlife, according to the NPC.

Jin Hua, an NPC deputy, said in a motion submitted last March that the need to ban the consumption of wild animals is urgent since hunting has destroyed the ecology and eating wildlife might spread diseases.

In June, customs authorities seized 213 smuggled bear paws from two Russian suspects in Manzhouli, Inner Mongolia autonomous region. It was the biggest bear paw smuggling case in recent years.

In Russia, a kilogram of bear paws is worth about 2,000 roubles, about 400 yuan (\$64), but the price in China for the same amount is usually more than 5,000 yuan due to a belief that bear paws have a high nutritional value, Xinhua News Agency reported.

Fan Zhiyong, director of the Species Program of the World Wildlife Fund's Beijing Office, said that the enhancement of wildlife protection through legal process is a growing international trend.

Many of China's wildlife species, including some kinds of turtles and deer, are on the verge of extinction due to the eating of wild animals, he said.

Law enforcement authorities should improve efficiency in wildlife protection, and the illegal trade in protected species must be strictly punished, he added.