



SURAT KHABAR	: THE STAR (STAR2)	MUKA SURAT	: 3
TARIKH	: 11/9/2018		
JABATAN	: PERHILITAN		
KLASIFIKASI	: PERHATIAN		

By KAREN ZHANG

THERE are alternatives to pangolin scales that have similar medicinal qualities, Chinese medicine professors say, urging the public not to believe the exaggerated effects touted by illegal vendors.

Their call, made at an international conservation conference last Wednesday, comes after reports that the amount seized in the first seven months of this year had reached a five-year high, with most of the contraband being sourced from Africa.

At the conference, traditional Chinese medicine academics, pangolin experts, and conservationists from mainland China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Vietnam and Africa gathered at the University of Hong Kong (HKU) to discuss how to protect the highly trafficked mammals.

The scales, comprising mainly keratin and believed to have high medicinal value, were found to be a major reason behind the poaching of the animals, whose meat is also seen as a delicacy. There is no scientific evidence showing that pangolin scales are effective as a treatment.

"Many herbal medicines have very similar functions to pangolin scales," says Prof Lao Lixing, director of HKU's School of Chinese Medicine, during the conference organised by international conservation group WildAid.

According to Prof Lao, in Chinese medicine, it usually takes between 5g and 9g of processed scales per dose, along with supplementary materials, to treat conditions such as breast milk stoppage, rheumatoid arthritis, sores and furuncles (or boils).

He explains that the industry often associated the medical qualities of an ingredient with the animal's behaviour.

"[Pangolins] can go through the soil, so it's believed that [their scales] can go through the vessels," Prof Lao says, referring to the meridian system, through which life energy flows, according to traditional

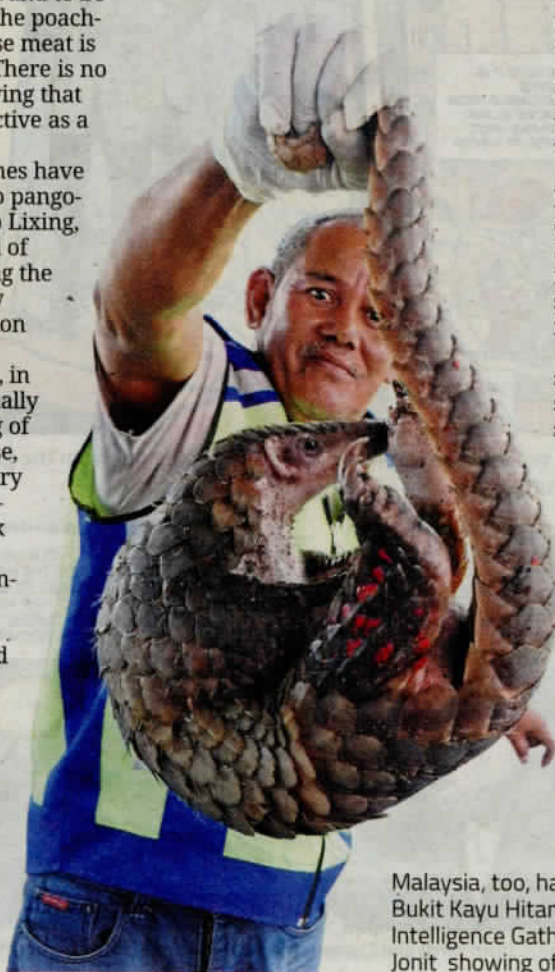
Chinese medicine beliefs.

Prof Lao listed six substitutes, including cowherb seeds (known in Chinese as *wang bu liu xing*), that could be used for promoting milk secretion. Earthworms, known as *di long*, can also dispel "heatiness" and expel wind from the body.

"There are so many [substitutes] if you look at the textbook of Chinese medicine. I just named a few here," he adds.

Prof Lao called on the Chinese government to educate the public about the medical properties of pangolin scales, as he fears that some people might think the products must be effective if they are banned. The effects are often exaggerated by illegal vendors, he says.

Dr Feng Yibin, associate director



Malaysia, too, has issues with smuggled pangolins. Bukit Kayu Hitam Border Security Agency Intelligence Gathering Unit supervisor Sarjan Anuar Jonit showing off one of the 65 live pangolins seized by the agency in July. — G.C.TAN/The Star

Consider alternatives to pangolin scales



A file photo from last year of a pangolin in a cage after a raid in Indonesia's Riau province that netted more than 100 critically endangered pangolins, a haul conservationists said was worth about US\$1.5mil (RM6mil). — Filepic

at the same school, says the institution's teachers always make it clear to students that the species is endangered and should not be used, although students are also told about their possible medicinal value.

On mainland China, raw pangolin scales can be obtained only at designated hospitals and from approved pharmaceutical companies, while legally sold processed scales must display a special label issued by the government.

The Chinese government has supported captive breeding as a solution by granting approval to some companies to raise pangolins. International experts at in the conference, however, questioned the feasibility of this approach.

Dr Helen Nash, vice-chairwoman of the pangolin specialist group under the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Species Survival Commission,



Seized pangolin scales on display in Hong Kong on Sept 5. — AFP

cites an IUCN study stating that pangolin farming is not financially viable and that many animals have died in captivity.

Nash says that although the success rate of raising pangolins in captivity is a lot higher than it used to be, the cost of doing so — about US\$7,000 (RM29,000) — could not be covered by the animal's market value. She adds that zoos in Singapore and Taipei have tried for decades to raise pangolins but only managed to raise a handful. There is currently no commercial data for assessment, she says.

WildAid CEO Peter Knights voices concern that commercial farming would become an excuse for encouraging the wildlife trade, as it is too expensive, slow, and suffers from very high mortality.

Dr Sun Quanhui, a senior scien-

tific adviser from World Animal Protection, cites a 2010 survey that found most consumers are willing to buy wild bear bile at a higher price despite being given three alternatives, including bile from farmed bears.

He adds that using wildlife is an obstacle to Chinese medicine going global as it leaves a negative impression and would face restrictions imposed by international players.

According to WildAid, Chinese pangolins have disappeared from most of their habitats, with their population having fallen by more than 94% since the 1960s. The demand then shifted towards the neighbouring Sunda pangolin, which in turn suffered an 80% decline over the last 21 years. — South China Morning Post