Challenge & Opportunity

HSI policy director Teresa Telecky and consultant Peter Livis visited China—the world’s greatest consumer of animal products—to assess treatment of and attitudes toward animals. What they found surprised them.

Skinning animals for their fur while they are still alive; eating dogs; feeding live animals to tigers and lions in safari parks across the country; farming endangered tigers for their parts and bears for bile extraction; and smuggling live wildlife from nearby countries under horrendous conditions to supply China’s exotic food markets.

On hearing the atrocities committed against animals in China, many feel hopeless. However, what we found is that awareness of the need to improve animal welfare is growing. Animal protection groups are springing up to find homes for street animals, rescue dogs from the meat trade, advocate against dog eating, and teach good pet care.

Officials are not only tolerant of the new concern for animals but in some cases have offered support. The Beijing government, already working with animal protection groups to help the city’s strays, has expressed interest in cooperating with HSI on urban animal management.

In 2008, a Chinese government agency hosted a meeting, co-sponsored by HSI, to discuss farm animal welfare. Some of China’s influential government officials and scholars have argued that tiger farming harms China’s tiger conservation efforts and its international image.

Today, more Chinese are expressing anger about animal cruelty, and businesses exploiting animals are on the defensive. The national press has intensively criticized bear farming and dog eating. Wildlife farming, once glamorized by the media, has lost its luster in the midst of public outcry.

In reality, no nation can claim to be free of animal cruelty. Instead of focusing on the negative, we should ride the wave of change that is beginning to surge through China and help emerging animal protection pioneers there to speed the changes they have set in motion. We arrived in China with doubts and uncertainties. We left with hope for the future.