

Correspondence

Clamp down on trade-ban violations

In response to the deadly outbreak of coronavirus 2019-nCoV (see *Nature* <http://doi.org/dk47>; 2019), China has temporarily banned the sale of wildlife in markets, restaurants and online. Given that much of this trade is already illegal, stricter enforcement and prosecution measures are needed if the consumption of wild animals is to be brought under control.

At present, prosecutions are often obstructed because of inconsistencies in the naming of species (Z.-M. Zhou *et al.* *Nature* 525, 187; 2015). Online trading in low-profile illegal wildlife as pets is commonplace (Y.-C. Ye *et al.* *Conserv. Sci. Pract.* <http://doi.org/dk49>; 2020). And the public's desire for exotic wildlife products remains undiminished – particularly for use in traditional medicines. Dodging the law on such a scale is a disaster for global biodiversity and animal welfare, as well as for human health.

When, or if, wildlife trade is again permitted, it must be better scrutinized so that stringent hygiene and quarantine standards at markets can be enforced. Advertisements will need to include the scientific names of species as well as their provenance. Supplies from licensed captive breeders must be properly regulated and inspected – a step that would also help pin down violations of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

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The Chinese authorities have imposed a temporary ban on the wild-food trade.

Total ban on wildlife trade could fail

The Chinese government's temporary ban on the domestic transport and sale of wild animals following the emergence of coronavirus 2019-nCoV is welcomed by environmental non-governmental organizations pushing for a permanent ban (see go.nature.com/3b9kqcx). But China's cultural demand for wildlife items could mean that a blanket ban would be counterproductive.

Total bans are controversial because they risk fuelling an intractable, uncontrolled and highly priced illegal trade, sustained by the rising incomes and social status of the country's growing middle class (D. W. S. Challender *et al.* *Front. Ecol. Environ.* 17, 199–200; 2019). China's complex culture is at the root of its demand for exotic wildlife items such as pangolin scales, tiger bones and rhino horns. Likewise, the consumption of game meat is regarded as healthy as well as an indicator of wealth. Markets selling such produce are prime candidates for passing

on new viruses.

This complex issue needs to be managed through initiatives that discourage consumption, such as wisely directed education campaigns that aim to discredit engrained cultural beliefs.

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Romania: help astronomers return

The political climate seems to be improving under the new government in Romania, but the country's research is still hampered by the Romanian Academy's outdated regulations. These discourage Romanian citizens who have pursued careers abroad from returning to many institutes – including to the Astronomical Institute of the Romanian Academy (AIRA) in Bucharest. As an astronomer of Romanian origin working in Spain, I urge the government to persuade the Romanian Academy to reform its regulations and open up its

research to its citizens working abroad and to scientists from the rest of the European Union.

There are no graduate astronomy departments in Romanian universities and the country has no useful observatories. When senior astronomers retire, there is no one to replace them because the bright young astrophysicists have all decamped abroad.

Although the academy announced in 2016 that its doors are open to EU researchers, jobs are advertised only in Romanian. Researchers wishing to return home must have their foreign PhD qualifications validated in Romania; they are then graded according to their previous Romanian employment.

Foreign candidates and citizens who trained abroad are excluded from senior research positions. For example, a high-grade post in astrophysics recently went to a home-grown researcher from another discipline. The academy's arcane rulings must be scrapped if Romania is to compete in international science.

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