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Ietermagos: from exotic dish to wine to pills

18 February 2022 | [Environment](#)







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Henriette Lamprecht - They have been walking the earth for 80 million years, eating ants and termites (up to 70 million a year!) And are harmless to humans. Yet ieternmagos is known as the most traded animal in the world and accounts for as much as 20% of all illegal wildlife trade.

More than a million eater maggots were harvested in the decade before 2014, mainly for their scales which are believed to treat a variety of health conditions in traditional Chinese medicine and are also considered a gourmet dish in Vietnam and China.

In Africa, magpies are sold as a type of "bush meat" for ritual as well as spiritual purposes and are also used in traditional African medicine. Many times, however, the animal is traded merely for clothing and fashion.

ENDANGERED SPEES

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), which regulates the international trade in wildlife, has been restricting the trade in magpies since 1975.

In 2016, it also added eight species to its Appendix I that are reserved for the strictest ban on extinction-threatened animals.

Ieternmagos are the only mammals that have a layer of large, protective keratin scales that cover their skin. Their behavior depends on the species to which they belong, with some living above ground, while others live in cavities and even in trees.

Predators like big cats struggle to get past an ieternmagô's scales when the animal rolls itself up, but although well equipped against natural predators, they are defenseless against poachers who simply pick them up in that position.

A KING'S JACKET

Although the trade in ietermagos seems to be part of modern times, it is centuries old.

An example of this dates back to 1820 when Francis Rawdon, the first Marquis of Hastings and East India's governor-general in Bengal, handed over a jacket to King George III made from the scales of the species *Manis crassicaudata*.

Part of an exhibition of the Royal Collections Trust is also a coat and helmet made from ietermagô and armadillo scales. It was handed over to King Edward VII by Bhavani Singh, Maharaja of Datia when he toured India as Prince of Wales in 1875-'76.

COVID-19

Early in the 2019-20 'coronavirus pandemic, it was initially found that the nucleic acid sequence of viruses taken from ether maggots was 99% consistent with SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes Covid-19.

It was believed that the virus originated in bats and that eating maggots was an intermediate host before infecting humans. The illegal Chinese trade in ietermagos has been proposed as a carrier for human transmission.

However, ietermagos was later eliminated as the definitive source of SARS-CoV-2, after it was found that the 99% agreement does not actually refer to the whole genome, but to a specific part known as the receptor compound domain (RBD).

A comparison of the entire genome found that the ytermagô and human viruses share only up to 92% of their nucleic acid, while at least 99.8% are required for a crucial agreement. Ecologists in particular were concerned that the early speculation about ietermagos as the source could lead to mass slaughter of the animals and only endanger it even more.

SWARTMARK

The black market in the food magma trade is primarily active in Asia, especially in China where the animals can be considered a plague.

Demand is particularly high for their scales, but the whole animal is also sold, whether alive or dead, for the production of other products with alleged medicinal properties or for consumption as exotic food.

PUSH

Ietermagos has a thick layer of protective scales made of keratin, the same material that makes up people's fingernails and rhinos' horns.

The scales are about 20% of the animal's weight.

On the black market, the scales can cost up to US \$ 3,000 per kilogram.

In traditional medicine, the scales are used for a variety of purposes. The ietermagos is boiled to remove the scales which are then dried and roasted. It is then sold with promises that it helps to promote the production of breast milk, helps to drain pus and also relieves skin diseases or paralysis. As of 2015, ietermagô scales were even covered under certain insurance plans in Vietnam.

MEAT

Ietermagô meat is seen as a delicacy in parts of China and Vietnam.

In China, the meat is believed to have nutritional value to help with kidney function. In Vietnam, restaurants charge as much as US \$ 150 for a pound of gingerbread meat. At one restaurant in Ho Chi Minh City, ietermagô is the most expensive item on the exotic wildlife menu and requires a deposit and a few hours notice before you sit down. Staff often kill the animal at the table in front of the guests to show how fresh the meat is.

According to Dan Challender of the International Union for Conservation of Nature's specialist group for food maggots, the fact that it is illegal is not underplayed or hidden at all. On the contrary, it only increases the appeal because it adds an element that you live far beyond laws.

TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

The official pharmacology of the People's Republic of China continues to include Chinese yam maggots in formulas for traditional Chinese medicine and there is a legal market for this.

Contemporary uses of the scales include, among others, to promote blood circulation. Pills made from powdered scales are also claimed to cure from infertility to anorexia in children.

Perhaps less commonly known is itermagô wine made by cooking rice wine with a baby itermagô. It would apparently help for skin diseases and improved breathing. The blood of ietermagos is also seen as something of medicinal value, while the skins are also traded.

AFRICA

In Africa, the hunting of and trading in itermagos is for spiritual purposes, traditional medicine and meat.

It is also used, among other things, to boost someone's finances and happiness and to protect you from spiritual forces.

CAPTIVITY A major challenge for environmentalists is the problems that maggots experience in captivity. The animals do not adapt well to alternative or artificial foods and often suffer from stress, malnutrition and depression which significantly shortens their lives. Precisely for this reason, the animals are rarely found in zoos.

Namibia

Ietermagos help maintain the delicate balance of the ecosystems in which they live.

Without these animals to eat termites, the carrying capacity of Namibia's pastures for domestic use and wildlife will be significantly reduced.

Ietermagos' large and elongated claws allow them to dig ditches under the ground where they can hide and also to dig out ant and termite nests for food.

In doing so, they mix and aerate the soil which improves the nutrient quality of the soil and the supports decomposition cycle that provides a healthy basis for the growth of vegetation.

Ietermagôs' underground holes also provide a home for many other animals, including the rare black-footed cat. Only one species of the ietermagô occurs in Namibia and that is the Cape ietermagô.

The Namibian Chamber of the Environment (NCE) has launched an outreach initiative to make compatriots aware of the animal's questionable status and to help stop illegal trade.

Sources: www.restnamibia.org; nce.org, en.wikipedia.org

PHOTO's

A coat made of scales given to King George III in 1820 as a gift. PHOTO WIKIPEDIA

Scales confiscated in Cameroon. PHOTO WIKIPEDIA

The illegal wildlife trade in Myanmar. PHOTO WIKIPEDIA

A food maggot is prepared to be cooked. PHOTO WIKIPEDIA