



# Care for the Wild International

The Granary Tickfold Farm Kingsfold West Sussex RH12 3SE United Kingdom  
Tel: 01306 627900 Fax: 01306 627901 E-mail: [info@careforthewild.com](mailto:info@careforthewild.com) Web: [www.careforthewild.com](http://www.careforthewild.com)

## SALE OF LIVE TURTLES IN TESCO CHINA STORES

### STATUS – AUGUST 2010

#### INTRODUCTION

Tesco PLC, the UK's largest retailer, acquired a controlling stake in the Hymall group of stores in China in 2004, and increased this stake to 90% in 2006. It currently operates more than 70 stores across China and is expanding at a rate of around 10 stores per annum.

Care for the Wild International (CWI), with the support of international scientific and veterinary experts and authorities, has long condemned the practice of selling live turtles on the grounds that it is detrimental to the welfare and conservation of the turtle species concerned. CWI believes that the sale of live turtles contravenes Tesco's own ethical standards, and that contrary to assurances made by Chief Executive Sir Terry Leahy at Tesco's Shareholders' AGM in 2008, the procurement and marketing of turtles by Tesco in China is not supported by "sound science".

#### ETHICAL POLICIES

Tesco publishes a variety of documents outlining a range of ethical policies and aspirations, including the following:

*"We demand high standards of animal welfare. We have livestock codes of practice which cover all aspects of animal husbandry for each species"<sup>1</sup>*

*"All the farms that supply us have to meet our livestock standards and codes of practice... We are also the only major supermarket to carry out independent audits above the minimum industry standards to ensure these standards are being met."<sup>2</sup>*

*"Tesco aims to apply the principle of sustainable development, meeting the needs of the present without compromising future generations"<sup>3</sup>*

*"We are committed to helping our customers and staff lead healthy lifestyles"<sup>4</sup>*

*"We never compromise ethics for the sake of profit"<sup>5</sup>.*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.tesco.com/csr/g/g4.html>

<sup>2</sup> Tesco: Corporate Responsibility Report 2010, p35. Available at:

[http://cr2010.tescopl.com/~media/Files/T/Tesco-Corporate-Responsibility-Report2009/Tesco\\_CSR\\_2010.pdf](http://cr2010.tescopl.com/~media/Files/T/Tesco-Corporate-Responsibility-Report2009/Tesco_CSR_2010.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.orchardacrefarm.com/downloads/20\\_May/tesco%20%20policy%20from%20web%20site.pdf](http://www.orchardacrefarm.com/downloads/20_May/tesco%20%20policy%20from%20web%20site.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Tesco: Corporate Responsibility Report 2010, p38

<sup>5</sup> Ibid,p28

## **DECEMBER 2009 MEETING**

At a meeting between CWI and senior management of Tesco PLC in the UK in December 2009, Tesco made the following claims:

- Only specimens of Chinese soft-shelled turtles (*Pelodiscus sinensis*) derived from farmed stock are offered for sale in Tesco's Chinese stores
- Current policy for in-store slaughter of turtles is decapitation followed by immediate crushing of the skull, a policy which was introduced following criticism from CWI and international scientific and veterinary experts. This was reconfirmed in an email from Hannah Clare, Tesco Corporate Responsibility Manager, dated 12<sup>th</sup> March 2010
- In-store staff are appropriately trained in recommended slaughter methodology

When asked whether live turtles were still being sold to members of the public for slaughter at home, Tesco management appeared uncertain of the current situation.

At the meeting, Tesco management agreed to re-examine current practice in their Chinese stores, and CWI agreed to share any evidence with Tesco that demonstrated non-compliance with acceptable welfare standards.

## **PROGRESS SINCE DECEMBER 2009 MEETING**

Following the meeting in December 2009, CWI provided Tesco management with a data CD containing its accumulated evidence of in-store practice from investigations carried out in Tesco's Chinese stores. However, in spite of a number of requests, no information has been forthcoming from Tesco regarding current in-store practice.

In an email to CWI on 6<sup>th</sup> April 2010, Hannah Claire, Corporate Responsibility Manager for Tesco PLC, stated that Tesco would only "respond to specific allegations about non-compliances in our stores", but that she was "not able to send ... copies of our standard operating procedures".

In this light, CWI asked contacts based in China to visit a number of Tesco's Chinese stores and report on current practice.

## **CURRENT PRACTICE**

### **1] STORE VISITS**

Visits were made during April 2010 to three stores: one in Beijing, one in Shenzhen, and one in Guangzhou. Further visits were made to the Beijing store in July and August 2010. Live turtles were displayed for direct sale to the public on each visit.

## Beijing store (Dachengdong, April, July and August 2010)

Chinese softshell turtles from Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces were on display. There was a large price discrepancy between turtles from the two provinces; those from Zhejiang were advertised at 18.8rmb each (figure 2), whereas those from Jiangsu were much more expensive (79rmb/500g) (figure 3). When asked why there was such a discrepancy in price, store staff were reported to have been uncertain. Live turtles were displayed in tanks adjacent to tanks of ice (figure 4), clearly indicating that turtles are chilled, which is likely to be detrimental to their welfare.

Staff indicated that turtles could be purchased for in-store slaughter or taken home live by the customer. In discussion with a staff member it was established that during in-store slaughter the staff usually don't crush the turtle's head; they apparently had a hammer for this purpose but lost it some time previously, and were currently using the instrument featured in figure 5.

The Beijing store was the only one displaying written advice to the public on how turtles should be slaughtered.



Fig 1: Tesco Dachengdong store



Fig 2: Turtles from Zhejiang, Beijing store



Fig 3: Turtles from Jiangsu, Beijing store



Fig 4: Turtles on display adjacent to ice



Fig 5: The tool used to crush turtles' heads

**Shenzhen store (Longgang, April 2010)**

Live turtles were on display for sale to the public. From the photographs taken these appear to be red-eared sliders (figure 6)



Fig 6: Red-eared sliders, Shenzhen store

## Guangzhou store (Zhongshan Six Road, April 2010)

Live turtles were offered for sale at the Guangzhou store. These appeared to be Chinese soft shell turtles (Figure 7)



Fig 7: Turtles, Guangzhou store

## 2] TELEPHONE SURVEYS

Telephone surveys of nine stores (Jinan, Shanghai Qibao, Tieling, Hangzhou, Shenyang, Foshan Shunde, Foshan Tianyou, Guangzhou Shengdi, and Guangzhou Liuzhong) were conducted by Chinese investigators on behalf of CWI in July/August 2010. Our investigators asked each store the following questions:

- Do you stock fresh live turtles in your store?
- Which kinds of turtles can I get?
- Can I get wild caught turtles, or are they all farmed?
- Do I have to take them home alive, or can you kill them for me?
- I'd like to have them with the heads on – can you leave the heads on when you kill them?  
How are they killed?
- How much are they? Why are there differences in price?

While all stores indicated they only supplied softshell turtles, three of the stores (Tieling, Shenyang, and Foshan Shunde) indicated that some or all of the turtles on sale were “wild”.

All the stores indicated that they could supply live turtles or kill them in store.

When asked how the turtles would be killed in-store, most stores indicated they would slaughter them according to customer requirements. Jinan store staff responded by saying they could “kill from the belly” (presumably this means removal of the plastron and evisceration), and Hangzhou staff said they could “cut the neck artery for bleeding”. Guangzhou Shengdi staff indicated that the turtles’ necks would be cut, but that the skull would not be crushed.

## **SUMMARY**

- Turtles continue to be displayed live in Tesco’s Chinese stores, for sale for in-store slaughter or to be taken home live by the customer
- Live turtles are displayed adjacent to tanks of ice. The cooling of the turtles’ environment in this way is likely to be detrimental to their welfare
- There are major price discrepancies in price between turtles from different sources in the Beijing store. The reason for this discrepancy is unclear
- Contrary to Tesco’s stated policy, Chinese soft shelled turtles are not the only species being offered for sale in Chinese stores
- Contrary to Tesco’s stated policy, store staff indicated that different methods of slaughter could be used depending on the customer’s requirements. These appeared to include cutting of the neck without subsequent crushing of the skull, and in one case removal of the plastron and evisceration. The instrument used for crushing of the skull in the Beijing store did not appear to be fit for purpose
- Since Tesco have declined to provide CWI with their Standard Operating Procedures concerning the display and sale of live turtles, it is not possible to determine whether the evidence from the stores demonstrates non-compliance with Tesco standards. However, CWI argues that the continued sale of more than one species of live turtle of varied reported origin in Tesco’s Chinese stores, the methods of display of live turtles in-store, and the indicated variability in in-store slaughter methodology, is damaging to the welfare and conservation status of freshwater turtles, and therefore contravenes Tesco’s own ethical standards

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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