The animal welfare implications of civet coffee tourism in Bali

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Abstract

There is a growing demand for civet coffee (also known as ‘Kopi Luwak’ in Indonesia), a luxury coffee produced from coffee cherries that have been eaten and partially digested by civets. Traditionally made using scat collected from the wild, the trend for ‘caged’ civet coffee, where live civets are taken from the wild and housed in captive conditions, is increasing. There is a rapidly expanding civet coffee tourist industry that has emerged within the last five years in Indonesia. The present paper is based on observations of the housing conditions of 48 wild-caught common palm civets (Paradoxurus hermaphroditus) at 16 of these tourist-orientated coffee plantations in Bali. A score between 0–4 indicating welfare concerns was given for eight husbandry factors at each plantation, including: mobility, hygiene, surfaces, shelter, noise, food, water, and social interactions. In addition, interviews were conducted with senior tour guides at each of the plantations to gather information regarding tourist activities and the civet coffee production taking place therein. The data allowed for a welfare assessment to be made, which highlights the inadequate conditions and negative impact on common palm civets associated with the caged commercial production of this luxury product, which are not associated with traditional collection of scat from wild-living civets. We hope that our findings will inform tourists and tour operators about the ethical implications of visiting these attractions.

Keywords: animal welfare, common palm civet, Kopi Luwak, Paradoxurus hermaphroditus, welfare assessment, wildlife tourism

Introduction

Civets are small mammals native to Asia and Africa. Wild civets are one of the least studied mammals, due to their nocturnal lifestyle and secretive nature (Krishnakumar et al 2002). However, we do know that they are largely solitary, primarily arboreal, and omnivorous, consuming insects, fruit, nuts and plant matter (Macdonald 2009). African civets (Vivera civetica) have been farmed for many years for their musk, which is used in the global perfume industry (Dorset & Dandeleot 1970; Mason 1984). Welfare concerns regarding the keeping of civets for the purposes of musk production have been highlighted in the scientific literature. For example, Tolosa and Regassa (2007) reported on the welfare and health of wild-caught captive African civets. In this study, 15 farms comprising 107 civets were visited across western Ethiopia. The authors reported that the civets housed at the farms suffered from poor diet and housing, and had a high incidence of parasitic disease. Furthermore, the trapping methods used, their adaptation to captivity, and the musk extraction method were all extremely stressful and painful to the civets. The authors concluded that the husbandry practices involved in farming civets for musk production have serious animal welfare implications. They suggested that further research is needed to explore specific welfare parameters.

In addition to farming civets for musk production, there is an emerging trend to trap wild civets for the purpose of producing civet coffee (known as ‘Kopi Luwak’ in Indonesia). The common palm civet (Paradoxurus hermaphroditus) is one of the primary species used, and Indonesia appears to be the main producer of this coffee (Shepherd 2012; D’Cruze et al 2014). Other countries known to produce the coffee include: East Timor, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam and Ethiopia (D’Cruze et al 2014). Civet coffee is an exclusive coffee and is one of the most expensive types on the market (Vega 2008). It is unique in the fact that it is produced using coffee cherries that have been eaten and partially digested by civets (Vega 2008). The digestive juices of the civets are claimed to slightly ferment the beans, adding a nutty flavour which is highly prized by some gourmet coffee drinkers (Meziane 2007). The practice of taking civets from the wild and housing them in captive environments to produce civet coffee has increased as a result of the rising demand for this luxury product from a variety of countries, including the United States (D’Cruze et al 2014). To date, the animal welfare concerns resulting from civet coffee production have received little attention. One exception is an undercover investigation conducted by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in 2013, which