



The true cost of the world's most expensive coffee

We were known as **WSPA**
(World Society for the
Protection of Animals)

The true story behind the production of the world's most expensive coffee is likely to leave an unpleasant taste in many people's mouths. This is because it increasingly involves the cruel capture and confinement of small mammals known as civets.

Civet coffee, or 'Kopi Luwak' in Indonesia, sells from \$300 USD per pound¹ and can cost up to \$100 USD per cup². It is made from coffee beans that civets partially digest and excrete. This digestive process is believed to ferment the beans and to be responsible for the coffee's highly-prized, smooth taste^{3,4}.

There is a long history of 'cage-free' civet coffee production, whereby local people gather civet droppings in the wild¹ - a method believed to produce the most superior tasting civet coffee of all⁵. But, increasingly, civets are kept in cruel and inadequate conditions in South East Asia to increase the yield of beans and meet the growing demand for this rare and highly coveted beverage⁶.



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Trapped for trade

Wild civets are captured using cruel methods, including box traps, snares and hunting with dogs. They are frequently injured during capture⁷ and likely to experience extreme stress through human handling. Many are sold directly to commercial civet farm owners, whilst others await their fate in noisy, bustling, wildlife markets⁷.

Those that survive capture are kept in small, empty cages, without adequate shelter or bedding^{7,6}. Conditions rarely meet the basic behavioural needs of these wild animals and many exhibit signs of great stress, including pacing and self-mutilation. Poor nutrition - resulting from being fed a restrictive diet of coffee cherries; disease; injury and early death are common⁷.



Production and sales

Civet farms range in size from small-scale initiatives operated by rural communities to larger more intensive businesses⁷.

Civet coffee is widely available across international markets including Europe and the US, whilst a high proportion of civet coffee consumers originate from Japan, Taiwan and South Korea^{8,9}.

Conservation consequences

In addition to animal welfare concerns involved in civet coffee production, there are also conservation implications, resulting from the unregulated removal of these wild animals from their natural habitats¹⁰.

A variety of different civet species are used to produce civet coffee⁸ some of which are already under threat of extinction. For example, the Binturong [*Arctictis binturong*], is classified as 'vulnerable' by the International Union for Conservation of Nature's red list¹¹; meaning that removal from the wild puts the whole species at even greater risk.

Other species such as the palm civet (*Paradoxurus hermaphroditus*) have more widespread distributions¹². But because there is no specific data on their numbers, civet farms may already be contributing to the extinction of local populations.



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Quality concerns

Fake and low grade civet coffee beans have been flooding the market for a number of years. Detecting 'counterfeit' civet coffee and maintaining quality remains a constant challenge because of the difficulty distinguishing between fake and genuine civet coffee beans¹³.

Establishing the difference between inhumane civet coffee (produced via caged operations) and the humane, wild-sourced type presents a similar challenge. In some cases producers mix caged civet coffee beans with the humane 'cage-free' stock before selling it to middlemen in the supply chain⁷.

We believe that current civet coffee trade chains are not transparent enough and that the end products are not adequately labelled to support both responsible retailers and consumers in their quest for animal-friendly products.



'Cage-free' coffee is better for everyone

Choosing 'cage-free' civet coffee is good for wild animals, good for conservation, good for coffee connoisseurs and good for rural communities, who can continue to generate a small income by collecting and selling the partially digested beans⁹.

Choose 'cage-free' civet coffee

Whether at home or abroad, we are advising coffee consumers to only buy civet coffee that has not involved the capture and containment of wild civets in caged conditions. If a retailer cannot guarantee it is from a 100 per cent 'cage-free' source, then don't buy it.

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Solving the problem

Retailer responsibility

We are engaging with retailers to pledge to only source 'cage-free' civet coffee and remove inhumane products from their shelves. Retailers believing their civet coffee already comes from wild, 'cage-free' sources are urged to scrutinise their supply chains and obtain proof that this is the case.

'Cage-free' Certification

We would like to see the introduction of an accredited certification scheme as standard for humane 'cage-free' civet coffee. We are urging retailers to lend their support and engage with certification bodies as well their suppliers to push for the development and enforcement of a humane chain.

Improved government oversight and enforcement

We are urging the governments of civet coffee producing countries to take steps towards ending the caged production of civet coffee and lend their support to 'cage-free' production initiatives that protect civet welfare, the future of the species and the livelihoods and well-being of local communities. We are also asking governments to take action to regulate and limit the removal of civets from the wild.

Righthand image: Nicky Loh/Getty Images for WSPA



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worldanimalprotection.org

5th Floor, 222 Grays Inn Road, London WC1X 8HB

T: +44(0)20 7239 0500 **F:** +44(0)20 7239 0653

E: info@worldanimalprotection.org