



Media Release

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The illegal trade continues: 79 shahtoosh shawls seized in 2019

The consistently high number of seizures shows that the trade in these “shawls of shame” is an ongoing issue. Efforts to combat the trade remain essential to prevent the Tibetan antelope from becoming extinct.

Because Tibetan antelopes cannot be shorn, the animals are killed in order to obtain their wool. Three to five antelopes are killed to produce a single shawl. The Tibetan antelope is already threatened with extinction due to excessive demand and the trade in shawls made from its wool (“shahtoosh”) is strictly prohibited. No exceptions are permitted, as was confirmed by two decisions of the Federal Administrative Court in December 2019.

Importing shahtoosh shawls is a criminal offence

In 2019, the Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office (FSVO) seized a total of 79 shawls; 38 more than in the winter of 2018. The higher number of seizures shows that targeted inspections lead to the detection of shawls. The FSVO will therefore continue to focus on customs inspections and training of officials of the Federal Customs Administration (FCA). However, it is also vital to raise awareness among potential buyers of these shawls: Anyone who brings a shahtoosh shawl into Switzerland not only commits a criminal offence and encourages illegal trade, but also contributes to the extinction of the entire species.

Over-exploitation of the Tibetan antelope

In contrast to certain other items protected by CITES, such as crocodile leather watch straps or a python leather handbag, there is no exception for personal use in the case of shahtoosh shawls. The Tibetan antelope is classified in CITES Appendix 1 – the highest protection category – in order to save it from extinction.

With this aim in mind, the FSVO and the FCA joined forces in 2013 to begin carrying out intensified controls. A high number of shawls are seized in Switzerland every year as a result. International cooperation is essential in order to combat the prohibited trade and help save this species: cooperation includes exchanges with authorities in countries of origin and provenance in order to coordinate and extend joint efforts.

Raising awareness is the best prevention

The consistently high number of seizures shows how important it is to make potential customers aware of their own responsibility. Buyers prepared to spend thousands of Swiss francs on these shawls must know that each purchase further endangers the species and that buying these shawls is strictly prohibited. The illegal import of a shawl made of shahtoosh wool is punishable under the Federal Act on the Trade in Protected Animal and Plant Species (FA-CITES).

Enquiries:

Federal Food Safety and
Veterinary Office (FSVO)
Media Unit
Tel. +41 58 463 78 98
media@blv.admin.ch