



## Mangshan Pit Viper Now Protected against Illegal Trade, under Scientists' Proposal

**M**angshan pit viper (*Protobothrops mangshanensis*), a rare and endangered snake, became listed in the Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) at the Convention's 16<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Conference of the Parties held in Thailand in March 2013.

The proposal from China was adopted unanimously by the meeting. Now, any trade of the pit viper shall pass the Non-detrimental Finding of the Endangered Species Scientific Commission (ESSC) of the People's Republic of China, China's CITES scientific authority under the Chinese Academy of Science, and obtain an export permit from the country's CITES management authority. Otherwise, no trade is allowed.

The Mangshan pit viper has a greenish body decorated with beautiful skin patterns. It has a large body size: an individual adult measures more than two meters long and weighs up to four kilograms. Mainly nocturnal and arboreal, it moves slowly and preys on small birds and rodents with a lethal injection of its extremely toxic venom.

This kind of pit viper was not discovered until the 1990s. In the late 1980s, a worker of the Mangshan Forest Farm was bitten by a huge, strange snake, which had not been seen before. Four years later, the snake was captured for the first time and sent to the Chengdu Institute of Biology, CAS for identification. Prof. ZHAO Ermi named it as *Trimeresurus mangshanensis*. In 2007, it was renamed *Protobothrops mangshanensis*.

Mangshan pit viper (*Protobothrops mangshanensis*). (Photo by Prof. JIANG Zhigang)





Mangshan pit viper (*Protobothrops mangshanensis*). (Photo by Prof. YANG Daode)

According to investigation, Mangshan pit viper now inhabits an area of only 105 km<sup>2</sup> in the subtropical forests in and near Mt. Mang in south China. Its total population is estimated to be around 500.

Since its discovery, Mangshan pit vipers have been shipped to many countries in the world. They soon became a new star in the international reptile pet market. A Mangshan pit viper was usually sold for hundreds of thousands of dollars. Due to the mounting demand of international trade, the animal's survival has been severely threatened.

CITES is an international treaty for controlling illegal wildlife trade and protecting the wild fauna and flora species threatened by international trade. By far, 179 countries have joined the Convention. China became a party of CITES in 1981. The Chinese government designated ESSC under CAS to take charge of all CITES-related scientific issues in China, with Prof. CHEN Yiyu serving as ESSC Director

and Prof. JIANG Zhigang from the Institute of Zoology as Executive Director, as well as 39 well known scientists nationwide as commissioners.

In 2012, ESSC invited Prof. ZHAO Ermi, Prof. YANG Daode, Prof. WANG Yuezhao, Dr. ZENG Yan and Dr. LI Jiatang to work together on a proposal to list Mangshan pit viper in CITES Appendix II. They evaluated the living status of the endangered snake, conducted field survey in Mt. Mangshan, inspected the type specimens and surveyed artificial breeding facilities in different regions of the country. Under the leadership of Prof. JIANG, they finally worked out a national proposal and submitted it to the CITES CoP 16.

The successful listing of Mangshan pit viper in CITES Appendix II will help to curb illegal international trade and provide legal protection to the endangered species for the first time.