

## Resettling Musk Deer:

# New Promise to Increase Musk Output

By Gu Zhong and Li Hui, China Features

Chinese scientists recently reported the initial success of a musk deer resettlement project which promises a way to expand musk deer distribution, and thus increase musk output.

Musk is a glandular secretion of the male musk deer, which begins to produce musk when two years old and remains productive until age 13. Musk is used in the East to make medicines and in the West to make perfumes.

China used to boast of having more than 90% of the world's musk deer resources. However, due to excessive hunting and environmental deterioration, among other reasons, the musk deer population in China decreased rapidly from 2.5 million in the 1960s to 100,000 today. Musk output, which stabilized at around 2,000 kg a year in the 1960s, has dropped accordingly.

In 1982, a six-member task force headed by Professor Sheng Helin of Shanghai's East China Normal University began experimenting with resettling musk deer to the country's warm and humid eastern coastal areas, an environment entirely different from that of the deers' original habitat in China's chilly, southwestern plateau areas. The project was undertaken with the hope that the distribution range of musk deer could be extended. To make it easier for the deer to get used to the higher temperature of their new habitat, they were moved in stages.

Twenty-five deer were transported from remote mountains in Sichuan province on the backs of hired hands, then by truck, train and boat, to three small islands in the Zhoushan archipelago southeast of Shanghai. Thirteen deer left to run wild soon died, attacked by local fisher-

men and their dogs. The remaining dozen, kept in a stockade, survived after Sheng and his colleagues developed a special feeding program for them. A second generation was later moved to warmer Tianmu Mountain in Zhejiang province and, in 1989, their offspring were sent to the still warmer Chongming Island, some 25 km north of Shanghai. To improve the blood line, another group of eight wild musk deer was resettled from Sichuan in the early 1990s.

The researchers reported early this year that the musk deer have not only survived Shanghai's high temperature and high humidity but, after an initial decrease in musk production, are now producing as much musk as they would on the Sichuan plateau; that is, an average of eight grams of dried musk per deer each year.

Today, the resettled flock numbers 38, and their reproduction rate has reached 15-25% a year compared to the 10-15% rate for their wild relatives. Most of the resettled flock lives in stockades on a forestry farm on the Chongming Island. The effort to preserve and increase the musk deer population continues; new settlements for the animal are being built in neighboring regions of Shanghai.

According to State regulations, no free trade or export of musk is allowed. Domestic consumption is solely in the making of traditional Chinese medicine, but medicines containing musk also sell well on the world market.

As long as need remains strong for musk, the successful resettlement of musk deer will be a blessing not only for the animals and their raisers, but also for the users—the cosmetics and pharmaceutical industries.