

Wildlife S.O.S Intelligence Cell works in tandem with Uttar Pradesh Forest Department-Endangered Sloth Bear Cub recovered from Azamgarh District

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In a battle of wits with wildlife smugglers and traders, the Uttar Pradesh Forest Department with assistance and information from Wildlife S.O.S cracked down on a Kalandar trader who had managed to conceal a bear cub for several months from the law.

In an all night operation with the Deputy Conservator of Forests - Shri N S Mishra, IFS and the Range Forest Officer - Mr Azam Khan were in direct contact with Kartick Satyanarayan, Co-founder - Wildlife S.O.S as the plot unfolded in a remote hamlet of 'Gosai ki Bazar' in Azamgarh District. The kalandar - Mr Neyur was caught red handed in possession of the seven month old Bear cub which was in agony. Neyur had been in hiding with this cub shifting it through the states of Chattisgarh, Jharkand after having procured the animal from poachers in the Sambalpur District of Orissa.

The Wildlife S.O.S enforcement team - called Forestwatch! run in collaboration with One Voice Association France had been on his trail for over 6 weeks finally getting a static location on the offender when he reached the village Katash located in Thana mei nagar. The Wildlife S.O.S team immediately tipped off the Forest Department giving them the exact and accurate location of the animal. Before the raid could be launched it started raining heavily and Neyur shifted the animal once again to Gosai ki Bazar by autorickshaw.

The WSOS intelligence team followed closely watching his every move and keeping the Forest Department informed every step of the way. The rescued bear cub had his snout pierced with a red hot iron poker and a coarse rope inserted through it. The Wildlife S.O.S team reached the location with a specialized bear cub keeper from the Agra Bear Rescue Facility and spent two nights with the bear cub providing it care and basic treatment. Following the issue of the court order the Wildlife S.O.S team along with a forest guard transported the Bear cub in an Air conditioned Van to the Lucknow Zoo as desired by the Chief Wildlife Warden.

The Bear cub is presently in the care of Dr.Utkarsh Shukla, Senior Veterinary Officer at the Lucknow Zoo. According to Natraj of Wildlife SOS who examined the animal ' The teeth of the bear cub have been knocked off and damaged. According to Shri C P Goyal, IFS - Conservator of Forests - Lucknow 'The U.P.Forest Department shall not tolerate such illegal trading of wildlife. We have been receiving intelligence and assistance from Wildlife S.O.S in conducting seizures of Bear cubs for over two years now and it has set a good example of networking between the Forest Department and the NGOs.

The Bear cub is extremely traumatized and requires to recuperate in suitable surroundings. The Wildlife S.O.S team also met with the Chief Wildlife Warden Shri D.N.S Suman, IFS who was clearly very supportive of such efforts. Such rescued Bear cubs can never be released in the wild as they have spent the most important part of their lives in captivity and in close contact with human beings. It would be a foolish and impractical exercise to attempt to release such animals back in the wild as

these cubs spent the first two years of their lives learning from their mother about various survival skills. Human beings can never replace the role of a mother bear. Once imprinted by close human contact and presence the cubs will grow into adult bears with no fear for man and will associate food with human beings and will not associate danger from human presence. This will clearly only increase bear conflict in the future with bears entering villages and human settlements. Such animals will become problem animals and will need to be destroyed at a later date when they become nuisance animals. The process of reintroduction into the wild is a complex one and we must not fool ourselves into thinking that by throwing such young cubs into the wild and putting a radio collar on them they will turn into wild bears and behave like wild bears. Carelessly and hurriedly planned release programmes will fail and result in the death of these beautiful animals. Very often by living in close contact with human beings bear cubs pick up diseases and illnesses that need to be treated prior to release in the wild. Releasing unscreened bears in the wild will result in contamination of the entire wildlife population.

The Kalandar named Neyur was arrested and booked under Sections 42, 43, 48, 50 and 51 of the Indian Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 and Section 11 of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960. The raiding team included Conservator of Forests-Azamgarh Mr. Dhirender Singh, IFS, DFO-Azamgarh Mr. Shesh Narayan Mishra, IFS and Range Officer- Mr. Azam Khan. Wildlife S.O.S team unit coordinating the operation with the forest department consisted of Kartick, Ganesh, Natraj and Rajesh. Eastern Uttar Pradesh still has around 100 'dancing bears' suffering at the hands of Kalandars. Some of these Bears are sold to kalandars in Pakistan for Bear baiting events. In their commitment to make Uttar Pradesh and India free of the cruel and illegal 'Dancing Bear' trade, the Uttar Pradesh Government has given a 145-acre extension to the Agra Bear Rescue Facility, a landmark collaborative project of Wildlife S.O.S with the U.P. Forest Department. The extension has made this Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre for sloth bears one of the biggest in Asia and the World.

This year 8 bear cubs rescued from different anti-poaching operations done in various parts of Uttar Pradesh (namely Fatehpur, Pratapgarh, Varanasi and Baliya) have been sent for rehabilitation to the Agra Bear Rescue Facility, a collaborative project of Wildlife S.O.S with the U.P. Forest Department and primarily funded by International Animal Rescue. Other support groups supporting the Agra Bear Rescue Facility are Free the Bears- Australia, One Voice France and Humane Society International - Australia.

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Wildlife SOS is an Indian Non-Governmental organisation working in the field of Wildlife rescue and Rehabilitation since 1995. Our main project is the rescue and rehabilitation of 'dancing bears', which are Indian Sloth Bears exploited by a gypsy tribe, called Kalandars for street entertainment purposes. We run the World's largest Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre for Sloth Bears in Agra alongwith 3 other centres. Working in tandem with the government law enforcement agencies, including state forest departments, Wildlife SOS has rescued over 390 Slothbears from leading miserable lives with Kalandars and with the recent extension to our rescue centre in Agra, we hope to eradicate the profession of 'bear dancing' by rescuing the remaining around 600 bears off the Indian streets and rehabilitating the bear dancers as well, so that they and their generations to come don't revert to 'dancing or poaching bears' ever again. Join hands with us in giving both man and animal a life of Dignity and Freedom!!! For more, visit our website, www.wildlifesos.org, our blog, <http://wildlifesos-india.blogspot.com> or e-mail at vasudha@wildlifesos.org

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