

## Wildlife S.O.S conducts a Rural Education and Awareness Programme in Kashmir to reduce Human-Wildlife Conflict

*To reduce Bear & Leopard attacks, Wildlife S.O.S is working to educate villagers living on forest fringes about precautionary measures to avoid encounters with wild animals...*

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Lammer is a small village located in Kulgam district on the edge of the forest. The tall pine trees and the picturesque view around the village makes this area an ideal habitat for wild animals often inviting visits from Black Bears and Leopards. In the past when hunting was still permitted, this area attracted bear-hunters.

In recent times, the forest edges merged with the fields and cropping patterns changed giving a rise to an increasing number of maize fields bordering the village. There was only one problem! - The maize while being lucrative for the farmers was also attracting the Bears from the forests. The villagers would try to chase the bears away and this was the beginning of the conflict. The livestock and sheep attracted the leopards. The Bears also found the rotting apples in the apple orchards irresistible. Soon people were getting attacked, sometimes leading to severe injuries and even death. In the bargain many bears and leopards were also killed in retaliation.

Wildlife SOS started working with the Government to address this issue. Following research and data collection, a Wildlife SOS team led by our education officer - Mrs. Aliya Mir and her team is conducting education programmes and informal interaction sessions with the villagers giving them courage as well as guiding them about how they can take precautions to avoid this conflict.

According to Dr. Shabir Mir - Veterinary Officer who was also a part of the education team 'The sessions and talks in this particular village was very interesting. We first had a lot of interaction about the villager's encounters with the bears and the frequent sighting of leopards.

Considering the high number of the Black-bear attacks on people living in this village, the Deputy Commissioner of Kulgam District-Mr. Mohd. Lateef Deva invited Wildlife S.O.S to organize awareness camps in the village to sensitise and inculcate tolerance amongst people with regard to the Bears and Leopards.

The civil administration along with the officials from the wildlife department participated in the awareness campaign and put forward their views and suggestions.

According to Mrs. Aliya Mir, Education Officer for Wildlife S.O.S's Jammu and Kashmir Moon Bear Conservation Project 'We helped to mobilize the villagers to give their inputs and moderated the discussions to make the programme interactive and beneficial for all concerned. At times there were heated discussions and arguments. I am glad Wildlife SOS is able to make a difference to the lives of people and wildlife.

**According to Kartick Satyanarayan, Co-founder of Wildlife SOS, 'These education programmes involve stake holders and help evolve common understanding on precautionary measures which would help reduce the human wildlife conflict. This much-appreciated awareness programme encouraged the participation of women and children.'**

Rohit Singh and Usham Singh - senior wildlife biologists of Wildlife SOS recently released reports on the conflict and helped plan these education programmes keeping in mind the local areas, terrain and culture. The villagers took a keen interest in the leaflets made by Wildlife S.O.S and were seen discussing the points mentioned therein. The patient interaction amongst the staff and the people helped in reaching a point of understanding and goodwill for animals amongst the people of this village

The workshop ended with the vote of thanks from the village head and for us at Wildlife S.O.S, such workshops give us hope that the Black Bear Project started with support from the Benindi Fund and in collaboration with IAR will indeed bear fruit.

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**Wildlife S.O.S** 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. In collaboration with the State Forest Departments, Wildlife S.O.S runs the World's largest Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre for Sloth Bears in Agra alongwith 3 other centres in Bhopal, Bangalore and Hyderabad. Working in tandem with the government law enforcement agencies, including state forest departments, Wildlife S.O.S has rescued around 400 Sloth bears from leading miserable lives with Kalandars and with the recent extension to the Agra Bear Rescue Facility, we hope to eradicate the profession of 'bear dancing' by rescuing the remaining around 500 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!!! The Bear Rescue & Kalandar Rehabilitation Programs of Wildlife S.O.S are primarily funded by International Animal Rescue. Other international partners are Free the Bears Fund Inc - Australia, Humane Society International - Australia and One Voice Association, France.

For more, visit our website, [www.wildlifesos.org](http://www.wildlifesos.org)

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You can also visit [www.wildlifesos.org](http://www.wildlifesos.org) for more information.