

Bear Cub rescued, Wildlife traffickers arrested in Karnataka

In yet another landmark victory to curb Wildlife crime in the state, Wildlife Authorities from the Karnataka Forest Department with a tip off and assistance from Wildlife S.O.S seized a live bear cub and arrested two persons. The 9-month old female bear cub has been transported to a Bear Rescue Center in Bangalore...

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Following investigations from an earlier seizure, DFO - Bellary Mr Rajashekar, IFS led the seizure operation with intelligence provided by Wildlife S.O.S's wildlife crime intelligence wing - "Forestwatch " (run in collaboration with One Voice, France).

"The intelligence gathering was done through the Forest Watch surveillance network, which had been ongoing for several weeks" said Kartick Satyanarayan, co founder of Wildlife SOS. "We had information about the presence of a bear cub and our informers were hot on their trail till we finally located them here" he added.

According to Mr.Rajashekar, IFS (Deputy Conservator of Forests - Bellary), "The bear cub was recovered from Hampinakatte village in Bellary District of Karnataka and Two persons have been arrested. Despite repeated warnings from our department, some members of the Kalandar community persisted in wildlife trafficking and bringing in bear cubs. Such wildlife crime has to be curbed. This seizure has sent a strong message to wildlife traffickers that they cannot escape from the law".

The raiding operation involved 20 personnel from the Karnataka Forest Department and Wildlife S.O.S Anti poaching unit. In addition, 5 vehicles were used in the raid operation.

An adult male adult bear aged about 10 years was also rescued. Persons arrested with the the bear cub are Mahboob Saab and Imam Saab. One of the traffickers Raja Hussain Saab also known as "Kenga" is presently absconing and the police are on his lookout. The accused persons are presently in Jail for being involved in bear cub trade. The Sloth Bear (*Melursus ursinus*) is a severely endangered species and receives protection under the Schedule 1 category of the Wildlife Protection Act 1972.

Other officers in the raid team were Mr. Kushallapa, Assistant Conservator of Forests Hospet. Keeping in mind the health status of the young cub, it has been shifted to the Bannerghatta Bear Rescue Center which has a dedicated cub care unit and specialized facilities. The Bannerghatta Bear Rescue Center is a collaboration between the Karnataka Forest Department and Wildlife S.O.S. This rescue center is primarily supported by International Animal Rescue as well as other international groups like Free the Bears Fund and One Voice.

According to Geeta Seshamani, Co-founder - Wildlife S.O.S "Such anti-poaching operations are crucial to the eradication of the 'dancing bear' trade at the grassroot level. The poaching of bear cubs has to stop in order to achieve a sustainable wild population of sloth bears'.

"The baby bear's delicate muzzle had been pierced with an red hot poker and a coarse, thick rope inserted to control the bear by her captors. The front canine teeth have also been crudely knocked out with iron rods" said Dr.Arun of Wildlife S.O.S

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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 & Kalendar 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

For more information, Please contact:

Kartick Satyanarayan

Co-founder - Wildlife S.O.S

+91-9810114563

Vasudha Mehta

Communication Officer - Wildlife S.O.S

91-9837099719, +91-9958980909

You can also visit www.wildlifesos.org for more information.