

Dreaded Bear Cub Poacher - trader arrested in Orissa along with weeks old baby Bear

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For the past three weeks, informers from 'Forestwatch', Wildlife S.O.S's Intelligence and Surveillance Unit (run in collaboration with One Voice Association-France) had been patrolling and maintaining a vigil on the Wildlife smugglers and wildlife trading routes in the towns & villages that are on the edge of the forested areas of Rehrakol and Sambalpur districts of Orissa, where sloth bears range naturally.

As cubs are born in the period November to February, the poachers strike during this period, either stealing the cubs when the mothers are out or more often than not killing the mothers to protect themselves from the anger of the vicious mother trying to protect her cubs!

However, late yesterday afternoon (10 Dec 2007) the Wildlife S.O.S (WSOS) intelligence team received confirmed information that a bear cub was in the hands of a trader named Jumman Khan in Rehrakol. Further information was received that alarmed the WSOS team - the trader Jumman Khan had further demanded from tribal poachers to poach and bring to him atleast 4 more bear cubs. Something had to be done immediately. Three hours from this moment, the WSOS anti poaching team was on a plane headed to Orissa.

Hitting the ground running in Orissa, amidst an exchange of frantic phone calls between senior officials in the Forest Department and the Police, discussions with the PCCF(Wildlife) & Chief Wildlife Warden - Mr. S C Mohanty, IFS and the Superintendent of Police - Mr. Sanjay Kumar, IPS were contacted. The WSOS Anti-poaching team drove all night and reached the town of Sambalpur in the wee hours of the morning (11 Dec 2007).

With no time to catch up on sleep, the bleary-eyed Wildlife S.O.S team met with the Conservator of Forests - Sambalpur Mr. Rajeev Kumar, IFS to draw up a game plan. The 2 vehicle team soon left for Rehrakol along with DFO-Sambalpur - Mr. P.K Jha, IFS. After a quick meeting with the local police team led by Mr. Sushil Kumar Panigrahi of the Rehrakol Police Station, a convoy of three vehicles were on their way to the rendezvous.

An sms from the Wildlife S.O.S surveillance team gave the team visual confirmation of the traders and the bear cub. What happened next was all high drama and done in a flash that lasted less than a minute! A convoy of three unmarked vehicles and the police jeep descended into Rehrakol, screeching to an abrupt halt at the spot of crime. In an avalanche of plainclothes & uniformed officers - the trader Jhumman Khan was arrested and bundled into the vehicle and the bear cub was confiscated. Another person by the name of Rafiq was picked up for questioning. The vehicles disappeared as rapidly as they came proceeding towards the police station for questioning.

The guttural cries rescued of the tiny bear cub, whose eyes are yet to open was heart wrenching for everybody present. The WSOS team and the forest department immediately made arrangements for the feeding & care of the bear cub.

According to Mr.Rajeev Kumar, IFS, Conservator of Forests-Sambalpur "The Orissa Forest Department shall not tolerate such illegal trading of wildlife. The intelligence provided by Wildlife S.O.S in conducting this seizure has set an excellent example of how networking and coordination between the Forest Department and the NGOs can aid in combating wildlife crime."

Kartick Satyanarayan, Co-founder, Wildlife S.O.S said, "Wildlife S.O.S is committed to ensuring that bear cubs are not poached and they do not leave the forest. In achieving this objective we shall leave no leaf unturned. We are grateful to the Orissa Forest Department and the Police for their support that resulted in this superbly executed seizure."

The accused has been booked under various sections of the Indian Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, under which trading in Sloth Bears is punishable with imprisonment up to 7 years.

'The interrogation of the accused Jumman Khan is in progress and we hope to unravel more links into the notorious Bear-cub poaching racket in this region' said Mr. Shankar Bahra, DFO-Rehrakol who reached the location just after the seizure was completed.

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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 4 other centres in Bhopal, Bangalore West Bengal and Hyderabad. Working in tandem with the government law enforcement agencies, including state forest departments, Wildlife S.O.S has rescued around 400 Slothbears from leading miserable lives with Kalandars.

With the recent extension to the Agra Bear Rescue Facility, we hope to eradicate the profession of 'bear dancing' by rescuing the remaining around 400 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

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