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LET'S PROTECT NATURE

YOUNG ZOOLOGISTS' ASSOCIATION
SRI LANKA
ESTD 1972

WORLD
SLOTH BEAR DAY



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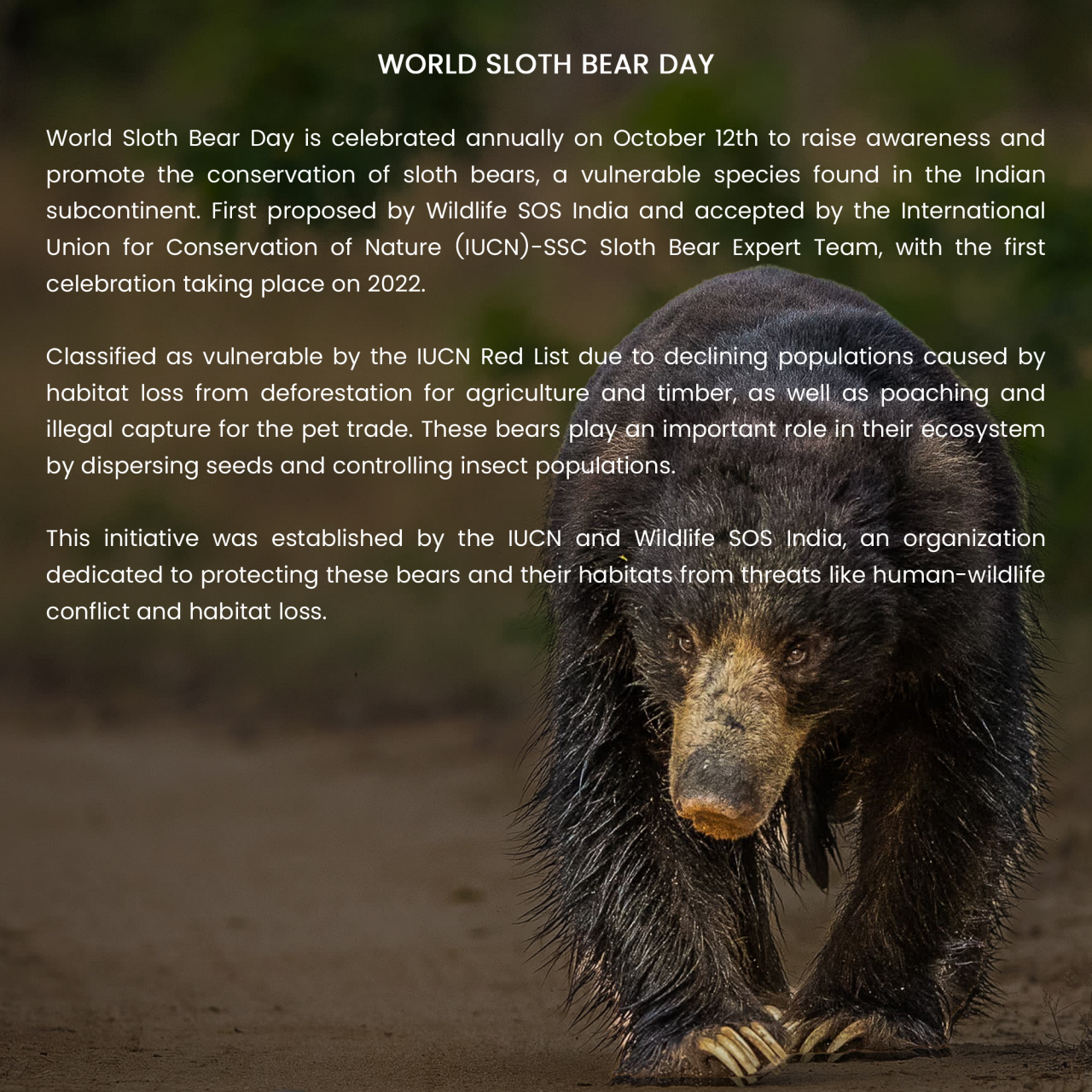
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WORLD SLOTH BEAR DAY

World Sloth Bear Day is celebrated annually on October 12th to raise awareness and promote the conservation of sloth bears, a vulnerable species found in the Indian subcontinent. First proposed by Wildlife SOS India and accepted by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)-SSC Sloth Bear Expert Team, with the first celebration taking place on 2022.

Classified as vulnerable by the IUCN Red List due to declining populations caused by habitat loss from deforestation for agriculture and timber, as well as poaching and illegal capture for the pet trade. These bears play an important role in their ecosystem by dispersing seeds and controlling insect populations.

This initiative was established by the IUCN and Wildlife SOS India, an organization dedicated to protecting these bears and their habitats from threats like human-wildlife conflict and habitat loss.



Why is World Sloth Bear Day important?

Raises awareness:

The day highlights the plight of sloth bears, which are considered Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List.

Promotes conservation:

It encourages support for organizations like Wildlife SOS India that are actively working to protect sloth bears and their ecosystems.

Educates the public:

It provides an opportunity to learn about the unique characteristics and conservation challenges facing sloth bears.





What can you do on World Sloth Bear Day?

Spread the word: Share information about sloth bears and conservation efforts to protect them.

Support conservation organizations: Consider donating or volunteering with groups dedicated to sloth bear conservation.

Visit zoos with sloth bears: Zoos often host special events and educational programs to celebrate World Sloth Bear Day.

World Sloth bear verities are recognized as 2 subspecies, differing in their distribution and physical characteristics:

Indian Sloth Bear *(Melursus ursinus ursinus)*

Distribution: Found in the Indian peninsula (India, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh (Possibly extinct).
Appearance: This is the largest of the two subspecies.
Habitat: wet and dry tropical forests, savannahs, scrublands, and grasslands

Sri Lankan Sloth Bear *(Melursus ursinus inornatus)*

Distribution: Endemic to Sri Lanka.
Appearance: It is physically smaller and possesses shorter hair, giving it a less shaggy appearance than its Indian counterpart.
Habitat: Dry tropical forests, savannahs, scrublands, and grasslands.



Indian Sloth Bear

They stand among the smaller bear species.Comparable in size to the sun bear and smaller than other bear species worldwide.

Long, shaggy, and typically black though it can have reddish or brownish tinges and is distinguished by a distinctive cream-colored,
V- or Y-shaped patch on the chest.

Inhabits various forested areas across the mainland.

Utilize a variety of habitats and the types of vegetation, in presence of human activity will influence their movements.



Sri Lankan Sloth Bear

Generally smaller, a phenomenon known as the "Island Rule for large creatures" where large animals that colonize islands tend to decrease in size.

Males have been observed to have less fur than their mainland counterparts.

Confined to the Northern and Eastern dry zone lowlands.

Tend to have smaller home ranges.





Sri Lankan sloth bear *(Melursus ursinus inornatus)* or වලහා in local language was originally classified as belonging to the sloth family (Megalonychidae and Bradypodidae) in the 1700s, thus named bear sloth. This error was not discovered until the first specimen of the bear was shipped to Europe
from India in 1810.

The bear sloth thus became the sloth bear. They are active during the day in protected areas, they tend to be almost exclusively nocturnal in disturbed and fragmented forests interspersed with human habitations. The sloth bear is a shy and reclusive animal, and is only found in pairs or several during courting (breeding) or when one encounters a mother and cubs.

Sloth bears defend by adopting an intimidating stance, standing on their hind legs to look larger and free their powerful, sharp claws to slash at a predator. They are known to be highly aggressive and have the strength and size advantage to overpower leopards, often successfully deterring an attack. Mothers also carry their young cubs up trees for protection.

Occasionally, they are also found in many when there are seasonal bounties of rich food, as during the season when trees as 'Palu' and 'Weera' yield fruit. It is the only member of the bear family that carries the cub on its back. The sloth bear has to quench its thirst every night and cannot go on for prolonged periods of time without water. Sloth bears use a wide variety of facial expression and calls to communicate with one another. Being omnivorous, the Sri Lankan sloth bear has a diverse diet consisting of both plant matter and meat. Their food preferences vary depending on the season
and food availability.

They eat in a wide range of delicacies including fruits, ants, termites, and honey. With their sharp claws, they deftly open beehives and savor the sweet honey and bee larvae inside. This adaptive behavior showcases their resourcefulness in finding food sources.



For those eager to witness the beauty of Sri Lankan sloth bears in the wild, we recommend the following locations:

• Wilpattu National Park - Situated in the North-Western dry zone of Sri Lanka, Wilpattu offers a captivating wildlife experience. Embark on a thrilling jeep safari through the park to spot the elusive sloth bears amidst the diverse flora and fauna.
• Yala National Park - As one of Sri Lanka's renowned national parks, Yala is a paradise for wildlife enthusiasts. Explore the park on an exciting jeep safari and keep a keen eye out for the fascinating Sri Lankan sloth bears that call this biodiverse ecosystem their home.
• Wasgamuwa National Park - While sloth bear sightings are renowned to be harbored in this park and has recorded high concentration of these endangered creatures, they are elusive and sightings are not guaranteed so visitors may also see large Sri Lankan elephants, including the marsh elephant, along with diverse birdlife and other wildlife.

Daroji Sloth Bear Sanctuary (Karnataka), Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve (Maharashtra), Satpura Tiger Reserve (Madhya Pradesh), and Kanha National Park (Madhya Pradesh) are the top spot to see sloth bears in India.

To save any species, it is vital that a thorough, science-based knowledge is acquired on the behavior, ecology and habits of that species.
Dr. Shyamala Ratnayake's major contribution to sloth bear conservation in Sri Lanka was conducting the island's first intensive field study of the species, beginning in 2003.

This research involved radio-collaring sloth bears to study their home ranges, behavior, and biology, which provided crucial data for conservation planning and led to insights into their ecology and
human-bear coexistence, including publishing a book on the subject and influencing children's conservation education.

Contributions to the Sri Lankan sloth bear population involve conservation efforts such as habitat protection through national parks, research, monitoring of populations, and public awareness campaigns to reduce human-bear conflict.
From extensive field studies in many of the National Parks of Sri Lanka to detailed analysis of her research findings and the publication of numerous papers of the subject, there can be few else who has greater knowledge of this enigmatic creature.
She has authored the publication of the book “Sloth Bear: the Barefoot Bear of Sri Lanka”, an essential addition to any who have interest in Sri Lanka Sloth Bear Conservation.

Exact Threats to Sloth Bears

Habitat Loss and Fragmentation:

Forests, the sloth bear's primary home and food source, are being destroyed or broken up by human activities like agriculture, urban expansion, and infrastructure projects such as new roads and railways.



Poaching and Illegal Wildlife Trade:

Bears are hunted and poached for their body parts, especially gallbladders, which are valued in traditional medicine, and claws.

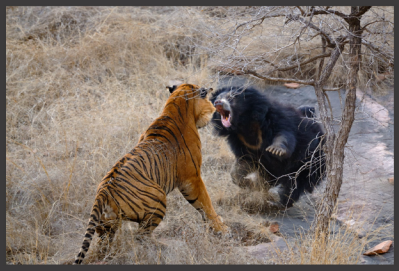


Human-Wildlife Conflict:

Bears can be killed or injured by snares, explosive devices, and open wells in areas where they co-exist with humans.

Exploitation for Entertainment:

Historically, and sometimes still today, cubs are captured, tamed, and forced into practices like dancing bears for entertainment and tourism, which causes significant harm to the animals.



Images from the internet

Resource Depletion:

The removal of termite mounds for their sand to build structures like tennis courts can also damage the bears' food sources and habitats.

How We Can Conserve Sloth Bears

Support Conservation Organizations:
Donate to or volunteer with organizations like Wildlife SOS or the Smithsonian's National Zoo that protect bears in the wild and in captivity.

Practice Ecotourism Responsibly:
If visiting areas with sloth bear populations, support organizations and businesses that promote sustainable ecotourism and advocate for wildlife protection.

Avoid Supporting Illegal Trade:
Refrain from purchasing products made from bear body parts, as this can fuel the illegal wildlife trade.

Promote Awareness:
Educate others about sloth bears and the threats they face through school projects or by starting conservation clubs.

Support Sustainable Development:
Advocate for land-use policies that minimize deforestation and fragmentation of sloth bear habitats.

Live with Bears Responsibly:
When in bear country, make noise by singing, talking, or using bells to alert bears to your presence and avoid surprising them.

Support Rescue and Rehabilitation Centers:
Organizations are working to rehabilitate rescued dancing bears, and supporting these efforts helps these bears recover and live in protected sanctuaries.
Other vital efforts include using ecotourism to provide economic incentives for conservation, promoting sustainable land use, and integrating community involvement to ensure the bears' survival and the preservation of Sri Lanka's biodiversity.

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