

## Fantastic Facts

**Bears belong to the family Ursidae** (*Ursid* is the Latin word for Bear).

Bears originated 20-30 million years ago.

**There are 7 species (kinds) of bears in the world** - a good diversity of bears

**Four species occur in India**

1. Brown Bear, *Ursus arctos*
2. Black Bear, *Ursus thibetanus*
3. Sloth Bear, *Melursus ursinus*
4. Sun Bear, *Helarctos malayanus*

**Basic bears body plan:**

**Large size:** They are big animals (1-3 metres long and weigh 27-780 kg).

**Powerful limbs, long muzzle and strong claws:** for climbing trees, digging and grubbing for food.

**Features**

They eat vegetables and animal matter; they are omnivores.

They live in forests ... chiefly.

They live about 25-30 years in the wild.

Their eyesight is very poor.

Their sense of smell is excellent.

They are nocturnal (like nights).

Their tail is vestigial (very short).

# Bears, Forests and Biodiversity



## Sloth Bear

**WHY** is it called Sloth Bear?

Because once it was mistaken for a Sloth due to its long, sharp, yellow-white claws, like a sloth's.

**WHERE** is it found?

Forests and grasslands in India, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Nepal.

**HOW** does it look?

Black with a white or yellowish patch on the chest in the shape of a wide 'V'.

**WHAT** does it eat?

Insects, mainly termites, also ants and beetles. Sometimes honey, eggs, dead animals and even rotten vegetables, fruits.

**HOW** does it behave?

Climbs with sharp claws, shakes trees for berries. Prefers night feeding. Aggressive when threatened. Hibernation not necessary.



## Sun Bear

### **WHAT is it called?**

Sun Bear is its name because of bib-shaped chest patch representing the rising sun in legend. Also called Malay Bear, Honey Bear and Dog Bear, the latter because of its short muzzle.

### **WHERE is it found?**

India, Bangladesh, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, Borneo.

### **HOW does it look?**

Dark brown/black with an orange heart-shaped mark on its chest. It is the world's smallest bear.

### **WHAT does it eat?**

Fruits especially palm, small, rodents, lizards, birds, ants, termites, earthworms and insects.

### **HOW does it behave?**

Frequently seen on trees; Claws highly developed for climbing. It climbs trees to rest when it is hot during the day. Hibernation not necessary.



## **Black Bear**

### **WHAT is it called?**

Tibetan black bear, Himalayan Black Bear, The White-breasted Bear, Moon Bear.

### **WHERE is it found?**

Forests in India, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Myanmar, Thailand, China, Japan.

### **HOW does it look?**

Black with a V-shaped marking on the chest and a furry mane.

### **WHAT does it eat?**

Anything ... termites, beetles, larvae, honey, fruits, nuts and berries, garbage, insects etc.

### **HOW does it behave?**

Highly adapted to tree climbing. Survives in winter by hibernating from a few weeks to six months.

## Brown Bear

### **WHAT is it called?**

Himalayan Brown, Grizzly & Red Bear. It's a model for the world's "Teddy Bear".

### **WHERE is it found?**

High altitudes and alpine meadows in India, Nepal, Bhutan, Europe, North America. Most widely distributed bear!

### **HOW does it look?**

Consistent body colour but found in many shades of brown as per locale.

### **WHAT does it eat?**

All kinds of plants, insects, snails, fish, mammals, small rodents, seeds, nuts, fruits, fungus.

### **HOW does it behave?**

Does not climb trees but collects food from the ground. Eats maximum food in summer for hibernating in winter.



## Threats to Bears

**Sloth Bears in India have declined in numbers due to the impact of human activities.**

**Some of these human activities are:**

- Destruction of habitat
- Habitat fragmentation
- Developmental activities ... dams, highways, spread of human habitations, etc.
- Conversion of forest to farm
- Human activity in bear habitat
- Competition with human beings for food
- Human animal conflict
- Hunting bears for sport
- Hunting bears for body parts
- Hunting bears for food
- Hunting bears for souvenirs and ornaments from claws and teeth
- Trading bear parts with South East Asian countries
- Hunting bears for medicine
- Hunting bears for revenge after an attack
- Killing bears when they enter crop fields or villages
- Killing bears in self-defence
- Killing parents of bear cubs
- Capture of bear cubs for use in roadside entertainment
- Captive conditions of "dancing bears"



**The Biggest threat to Sloth Bears in India and Nepal has been bear shows**

**The Evil Entertainment Industry of dancing bears**

Have you seen a bear show on the road or in a village? These are common in India but occasionally occur in Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and maybe Pakistan. Bears are trained to perform by a community called the *Kalandars* who have done as their primary livelihood for centuries. Evil trappers kidnap small cubs from the forest and shoot their *Mama & Papa* when he's around. Then they sell the cubs to the *Kalandars*.

- They tame the cubs with fear and torture.
- They force a metal ring through their nose, tie a rope and drag them along on hot tarmac.
- They keep the bear hungry and malnourished so they have no strength to harm or run away.
- They break their canine teeth.
- They work them daily in hot sun on hot roads which burn their tender pads.
- They don't allow the bears to breed.
- They make life so hard for the bears that they die young due to bad captive conditions.

## Bears and People

### Bears on the Road, not in the Forest

#### What should we do to stop "Bears on the Road"?

The dancing bears of this region are suffering terrible torment. Tourists see this and write complaining letters to the Indian government. Also, the many bear cubs captured from the forest and the mothers who are killed result in big declines of the total bear population of India which is not good for the forest ecosystem. We should try to stop it for the good of our country. Here is how you can help.

1. Next time you see a dancing bear on the road, don't stop to watch the show. Drive or walk by.
2. Don't give money to the owner as he won't spend it on bears.
3. Educate others who think seeing bears dance is fun and don't what pain it causes bears.
4. Become a "Performing-Bear Policeman" in your area.
5. Create awareness about the conservation impact of bear shows.
6. Money is not much and conditions of this work are hard for people also. They can learn another and BETTER trade doing things like selling merchandise, running a shop, stitching, and other crafts. We can push them into a better way of life by not supporting their bear acts.



Inform local wildlife officers, police and Bear NGO's when you see any bear show, giving exact location.

Government and above named some animal welfare NGOs are collaborating to house confiscated bears in spacious enclosures where most of their needs are met. Wildlife SOS even has a long-term solution in which they help find other work for these dancing bear people.

There is NO GOOD REASON for bears to be on the road and not in the forest.

Already there are many bears which have been confiscated and are in the rescue facilities mentioned above or other centres at zoos. Much of the trade in some states has been curtailed. We can't be confident that the *Kalandars* won't go back to it if their new business fails and the final hard time. **Help stop it for good by reporting sightings.**



## Bear Facts - useful to People

Bears are curious creatures. They are intelligent, fast and strong. It is not good for humans to be overcome by fear in bear forests - it can impair your judgment and make you too nervous to get away in time. Learning how to behave in the forest can help you get along with bears. Bears are not looking for people to eat. They have much better things .. grubs, berries, honey etc. It has been said that if you give a bear an opportunity to leave you alone, he will. Bears had rather not encounter human beings and few forest visitors ever see a bear.

Experts advise if you are hiking through the forest where there may be bears, *don't surprise them*. Go in groups and make noise singing, talking or making some unfamiliar metallic noise. They also advise walking with the wind at your back so the bears will be warned of your arrival. Bears can see very well but their sense of smell is even better. Wearing perfume or aftershave might turn off the bears unless it is very sweet smelling.

Watch out for bear trails and stay away from them. If you come across carcasses of dead animals steer clear as it could be a bear's kill which he is guarding from a small distance, so give plenty of space. Don't leave your own food leftovers to attract a bear. Even garbage with a smell great to a bear so burn it to cinders and take the ashes with you. Bears can smell buried food and will have it dug up in no time.

There is a lot of advice for what to do when, despite care, you actually encounter a bear. "Don't run" is one advice because you will lose the race. It is said to be better to remain calm and let the bear know you are a person, not a medium sized animal. Wave your arms and talk to the bear. Bears often charge without meaning to go through with an attack. In such a case you should stand your ground, wave your arms to make yourself look bigger and shout aggressively. Making noise with rowdy implements such as iron pots and pans is good. Don't make whining or squeaking noises ... this will communicate weakness.

**Maybe it is better to find a less populated place for your nature walks and stay out of bear country!**

## Bears need Forests

Almost all bears live in some type of forest.

**Black Bears:** Black bears have an extensive but now-disjunct range. In South Asia, they are found in Aghanistan, Pakistan, northern India, Nepal, Bhutan, east to Vietnam, northeast China. North they live SE Russia, Taiwan & Japan. Asiatic black bears generally live in temperate mountain forests and brushy areas.



**Sloth Bears:** The highest number of Sloth bears live in India and Sri Lanka; lesser numbers occur in southern Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh. They live in both dry and wet forests and in some grasslands. Sloth bears are dependent on forests for food, fruits and even flowers, ants, termites, honeycombs, grubs, beetles and other insects. Only if these are in short supply will they eat dead animals or raid farm crops.



**Brown Bears:** Brown bears live in mountain forests and grassy wilderness in North America, Europe and Asia. Small populations can be found in northern India, Himalaya, and other countries. Brown bears eat both meat and plants. Most brown bears primarily eat vegetation, including tubers, berries and pine nuts hence their dependence on forests. They also eat moths, grubs, rodents, carrion and sometimes large animals. Salmon or trout are important foods.



**Sun Bears:** The sun bears' exact distribution is unknown, but it has been found in Northeast India and many parts of Southeast Asia, including Burma, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, Borneo and Sumatra. Sun bears inhabit lowland tropical rainforest. Sun bears eat a variety of rainforest fruits and vegetation, including palm shoots. They also feed on insects, honey, birds, and other small animals that shore the forest.

