

21st International Conference on Bear Research and Management: A coherent system for bear management

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Release of National Bear Conservation and Welfare Action Plan

Bears are mammals that belong to the family *Ursidae* and are represented by eight living species that are widely distributed in a variety of habitats throughout the Northern Hemisphere and partially in the Southern Hemisphere. Bears are found on the continent of North America, South America, Europe and Asia. They are one of the most diverse groups of large mammals. Out of the total 8 species of bears, two species occur in Europe, three in North America, one in South America, and six in Asia. The four species of bears in India are spread across 26 states of the Indian Union. They occupy both, the protected as well as non protected areas and thus represent rather well the diverse range of habitats in India possesses. There is a need to design research projects for studying various facets concerning bear conservation. It is important for bear scientist researchers across the world to share the quality information and knowledge products which will further complement conservation efforts at the field level. With this view, 21st International Conference on Bear Research and Management was hosted in India.

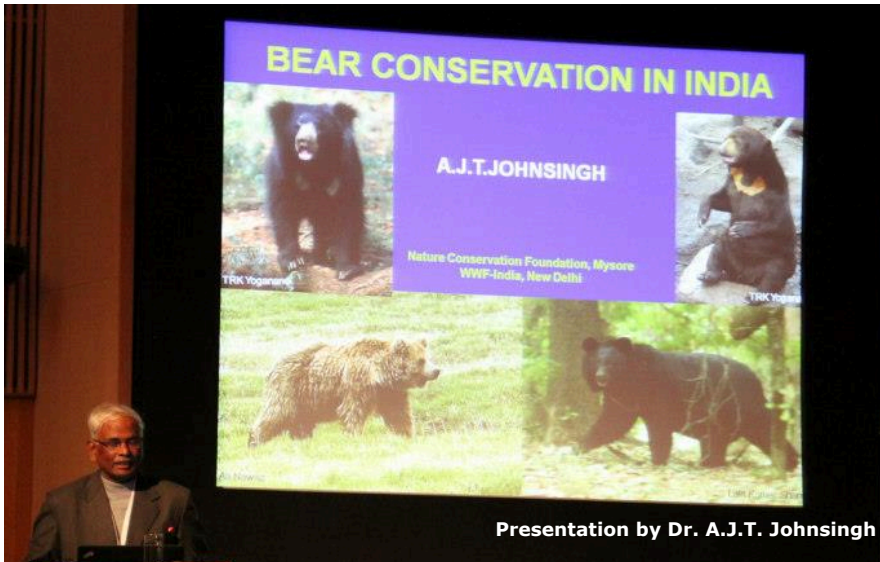
The five day conference was declared open by Mrs. Jayanthi Natrajan, Minister of State, Environment & Forests, Government of India. She in her opening remarks mentioned 'Understanding of Asian Bear is important for their future'. She also pointed out that, India has four species of bears that are seriously threatened due to poaching for illegal trade in bear parts, live-cub trade, and retaliatory killings to reduce conflicts; and also due to habitat loss, degradation and fragmentation'. The Minister also laid emphasis on setting up of rescue teams in the areas with high human-bear conflict. She assured the gathering that the Ministry of Environment and Forests, will take all plausible measures required to mitigate conflict and would help the different forest departments tackling the Human-Bear conflict issues, in all possible ways. "The Ministry of Environment and Forest, Govt. of India, will take all plausible measures to enhance technical inputs for implementing of research, management and conservation plans through the specialized institutions/ experts in the concerned field," said Mrs. Natarajan.

S.S. Garbyal (Additional Director General of Forests), Vivek Menon (Executive Director & CEO, Wildlife Trust of India), Chief Post Master General, India and Frank V Manen, President- International Bear Association, chaired the opening session panel. He also urged more than 300 participants from 137 countries, to explore the successes and the challenges faced by the bears throughout the world, and formulate recommendations on improving organizational leadership within the conservation management systems. Frank V Manen, president IBA, very precisely put forward his point, and by taking the attention of the delegates to the wonderful work done for bear conservation and welfare throughout the world and also emphasized that 'a lot needs to be achieved in terms of conserving bear habitats across the globe'. The land of the mythological bear king Jambavan and four living species of bears, India is a fit destination for the world to come and contemplated on the future of the mega fauna,' said CEO Wildlife Trust of India.

The much anticipated, National Bear Conservation and Welfare Action Plan 2012, was launched by the Honorable Minister during the opening session.



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The plan is a compilation of 26 state welfare action plans. The action plan outlines participatory processes which would ensure ownership and improve prospects for implementation, which would eventually lead to persistent conservation success. A special cover on bears of India was released by the Hon'ble Minister and the Chief Post Master General, India followed by presenting Freedom awards to the deserving people/organization/NGO's, concerning bear conservation. The five day session witnessed more than 130 oral presentations, more than 50 poster presentations, and workshop by Dave Garshelis, Silent auction and Student discussion session.

**Plenary talk/Full presentation/
Lead presentation/Speed
presentation**

The first day, **technical session-I: Bear Conservation in India**, chaired by the Secretary MoEF, was set off by a plenary, by Dr. A.J.T. Johnsingh, on Conservation of bears in India. He through his presentation focused on status of bears in India. He began by mentioning, why bears form an integral part of the life in India for centuries. He also explained how support of people living in the bear landscape is exceedingly crucial to ensure the continuity of the one of the biological uniqueness of India, occurrence of four bear species. Followed by his presentation, a full presentation was given by Dr. S. Sathyakumar, Wildlife Institute of India, who discussed about the need of having National Bear Conservation Action Plan. He in his talk explained, how the document went through different stages, to give the plan the

final contour. He also pointed out that, this first comprehensive attempt to produce action plans for bear species in the States and if implemented will produce enough information to provide a good background for protection of bear species in their States.

Ian Robinson, International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), United States, gave a presentation on 'Bear Rehabilitation in India'. He explained, how rehabilitating brown bears in western Russia, and grizzly bears in western Canada, IFAW brought this experience to India to set up a rehabilitation project in Arunachal Pradesh to rehabilitate cubs seized from poachers. The first day of the conference successfully concluded by a presentation by Chris R Shepherd, TRAFFIC Southeast Asia, Malaysia. He presented his work on 'Combating the

illegal trade in bear parts and derivatives in Malaysia turning information into action'. He spoke about the surveys carried out in 2010 by the TRAFFIC Southeast Asia in 13 countries and territories in East and Southwest Asia.

The second day observed a plenary talk by John Beecham. He spoke about the 'Best management practices for raising orphan bear cubs for release back to the wild'. He discussed about the short and long term implications of released programs on wild bear populations. He presented guidelines for establishing a model programme for raising, releasing and monitoring orphan bear cubs that are released back to the wild. Day two also had technical session: *Ex-situ* conservation and management of bears in captivity and bear rescue and rehabilitation. There were presentations on 'Bear rehabilitation in tropics: A case study of Asiatic black bears (*Ursus thibetanus*) in India by Soumya Dasgupta from Wildlife Trust of India. Day two also had the much awaited workshop on, 'Bear Sign Surveys' by Dave Garshellis.

Day three, delegates were taken on a visit to Agra Bear Rescue Facility and Taj Mahal. Day four, second last day of the conference, was tightly scheduled with three technical sessions. Bear Specialist Group Presentations. Dave Garshellis, updated the audiences with the range map of Asiatic black bears and Sun bears, he also discussed about the IUCN resolutions to curtail bear farming. Also presented were





Release of Nation State Action plan on Bears in India

developments of principles for dealing with human-bear conflict, by John Beecham. The third technical session: Bear Conservation and Community Participation; had about nine presentations. Vivek Menon, Wildlife Trust of India, spoke about 'Stalling the tradition of Dancing Bears in India'. He talked about the Kalandar community in three Indian states, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Bihar. He emphasized that, building capacities for Kalandars to make alternative livelihood sustainable, and ensuring next generation does not return to wildlife to earn livelihood, is most important. Technical session: Ecology & Behavior; had ten presentations in all. Lead presentation, 'It's all about food insights into American Black Bear behavior and demography from a 28 year survey of wild fruits' by Karen Noyce was delivered.

Poster presentations

More than 50 participants presented their posters on various topics related to distribution and conservation status, population estimation and monitoring of Bear ecology and behavior.

Dong-Hyuk Jeong, from Species Restoration Center, South Korea, presented a poster on '2012 status of Asiatic black bear restoration project in Korea'. Although in the past lots of Asiatic black bear inhabited in Korea, the size of populations were decreased because of poaching and habitat loss, they became an endangered species. In 2001, four captive cubs with radio transmitters were released experimentally to confirm whether the bear could adapt to the environment of

Jisan National Park (JNP) and to study reintroduction methodology. As a result of that they could obtain lots of information for the restoration of Asiatic black bear in Korea and have started introduction and releasing of bears from Russia, North Korea, and China which were distributed same sub species (*Ursus thibetanus ussuricus*) with Korean peninsula since 2004.

An overview of bear trade in India by Abrar Ahmed was presented in the form of a poster. Two species of Indian bears, namely the Sloth bear (*Ursus arctos*) and Himalayan black bear (*Melursus ursinus*) and their derivatives have been regularly recorded in illegal wildlife trade in India. Despite being listed in Schedule-I of Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 with a blanket ban on trade in live bears and their body parts, they are still exploited for their bear bile, meat, skin and live cubs are collected and smuggled for bear baiting to Pakistan, for private and international zoos, bear farms and street performances. Shaenandhoa Garcia-Rangel, from Departamento de Estudios Ambientales, Venezuela, explained the 'Spatial analysis of conflict and poaching patterns across Andean-bear distribution'. Amongst mammals, carnivores report the most variety of threats across the world. By the year 2011, 25.3% of species within *Carnivora* were known to be already extinct or threatened. The Andean Bear Expert Team (ABET) carried out and unprecedented effort to compile the information available on this threat following a systematic review approach and to evaluate the spatial pattern of

poaching and conflict events using species distribution model.

A very striking poster on the 'Developing a Conservation Action Plan for Taiwan Black Bears' was put up by Mei-Husi Hwang, from Institute of Wildlife Conservation, Taiwan. Asiatic black bears in Taiwan were listed as an endangered species under the Wildlife Conservation Law in 1989. The Action Plan was developed following the IUCN's (2008) guidelines for Conservation Strategic Planning, which takes into consideration the value of inclusion and participation of diverse stakeholders such as managers, researchers, Chinese medicine traders and local people.

Student session

The Student Session was prearranged on the fourth day of the conference, 29th November 2012, keeping in mind, the changing trends in conservation research across a wide spectrum; and in understanding cross-cultural dimensions; as it is important to understand structures and processes created to insure inter-sectoral learning. It was an informal meeting where students met experienced bear researchers for an exchange of ideas and requested input on study design, discussed the issues related to research methodology and ask for technical assistance. It was organized to foster dialogue, facilitate informed, equitable decisions, enhance the benefits of and opportunities derived from wide and extensive discussions. Student session can be taken as a successful endeavor, as lot of researchers agreed to keep in touch, share their views and thoughts and research findings in near future and to work together to put the welfare of bears on the global agenda.

Silent auction

Since Mexico 2007, beautiful pieces from all over the world are collected to raise funds to enable deserving students to attend the IBA Conferences. Students and IBA members were asked to donate unique bear related crafts from their regions, and bring them to the conference. Photographic or artistic flair, photography and special art work were displayed for auction. The money collected from the auction, were used in the various endeavors related to bear conservation by the International Bear Association (IBA).