

## **Sloth bear cub dies at Woodland Park Zoo**

SEATTLE - Woodland Park Zoo is sad to announce the loss of its sloth bear cub. Born December 19 to first-time mother, 3-year-old Kushali, the cub died of unknown causes overnight under the care of its mother in a private maternity den. This is the second cub to pass from Kushali's December 19 litter—the first cub was not viable and did not survive past the first 48 hours.



“Kushali and her cub were being monitored closely by staff using cameras with microphones mounted in the maternity den,” said Martin Ramirez, Woodland Park Zoo mammal curator. “Observations indicated that the mother was attentive and nursing. Unfortunately, sometime between 9:00 p.m. and midnight on December 29, the cub passed away while the mother slept. She was observed on the cameras trying to wake it and could be heard calling it but the cub was unresponsive.”

It is not uncommon for first time sloth bear mothers to lose their litter. Sloth bears are born extremely small and blind at birth. They open their eyes at between 3 to 4 weeks old and can walk shortly after their eyes open. The first 72 hours is very critical for a cub, though it is important to monitor cubs the first few months to ensure they continue to grow and remain healthy.

“Because it is a defense mechanism in this species to consume any dead offspring so as not to attract predators, we may never know the cause of death of either cub,” said Ramirez. “It was clear that Kushali, a first time mother, was attentive and showing all the appropriate maternal behaviors, so the cubs may have been born compromised in some way but that is speculation at this point. While we’re saddened by the loss of the cubs, we were encouraged to have seen Kushali doing everything she could to care for them. She will have other opportunities to breed in the future.”

Sloth bears are found in the lower elevations of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka. They are an endangered species, less than 10,000 remain in the wild. Their survival is challenged by fragmented populations, competition with other animals (particularly humans) for space and food, deforestation, and the bear parts trade for use in traditional Asian medicines. For over 400 years sloth bears were targeted for human exploitation to perform as “dancing bears;” in 2009, the last dancing bear in India was released. Woodland Park Zoo is a participant in the sloth bear Species Survival Plan (SSP), a cooperative breeding program under the Association

of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) that ensures genetic diversity and demographic stability among North American zoos. Prior to these cubs, Woodland Park Zoo had five sloth bear births; two sets of twins and one cub which did not survive.

Woodland Park Zoo participates in 95 SSPs, overseen by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums. Led by experts in husbandry, nutrition, veterinary care, behavior, and genetics, SSPs manage populations in North America to maximize their genetic and demographic diversity with the goal of ensuring their long-term survival. SSPs also involve a variety of other collaborative conservation activities such as research, public education, reintroduction and field projects.

Accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums, award-winning Woodland Park Zoo is famed for pioneering naturalistic exhibits and setting international standards for zoos in animal care, conservation and education programs. Woodland Park Zoo is helping to save animals and their habitats through more than 40 field projects in the Pacific Northwest and around the world. By inspiring people to care and act, Woodland Park Zoo is making a difference in our planet's future ecological health and sustainability. For more information, visit [www.zoo.org](http://www.zoo.org).

**###**