

PRESS RELEASE

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Find photos of Tasha here:  [Tasha sloth bear 2025](#)

Zoo loses elderly sloth bear, Tasha, to cancer Tasha is the grandma of baby Bowie

SEATTLE—Woodland Park Zoo is mourning the loss of Tasha, a 20-year-old, female sloth bear. The elderly bear was humanely euthanized after cancer was discovered during a diagnostic exam.



Showing signs of rapidly declining health, lack of appetite, and lethargy, Tasha underwent an urgent diagnostic exam which revealed a large amount of free fluid in her abdomen containing malignant tumor cells. This indicated a diagnosis of advanced cancer with severe systemic effects, explained Dr. Tim Storms, Director of Animal Health at Woodland Park Zoo. "Considering the severity of her condition and a grave prognosis, we made the humane decision to euthanize Tasha," said Storms.

"Tasha was possibly our most beautiful sloth bear. Her long shaggy coat was always perfectly arranged and flowed in the wind when she walked. Her expressive hazel eyes appeared full of deep thought. Tasha was extremely intelligent and absolutely loved anything cinnamon-flavored, honey and watermelon," said Miero Marra, an animal keeper at Woodland Park Zoo. "An excellent and protective mother, Tasha taught her cubs how to be sloth bears. We're all going to miss Tasha a lot, her quiet but powerful presence."

At 20 years old, Tasha was considered a geriatric bear; the median life expectancy of sloth bears in zoos is 16 years old. Tasha was the grandmother of 4-month-old Bowie who was born to Tasha's daughter, Kushali (kuu-SHAW-lee). Zoo-goers can see Bowie, named after musical icon David Bowie because she shares his birthday, and mom in the zoo's Banyan Wilds. The other sloth bear currently living at the zoo is Bhutan (boo-TAHN), the dad of Bowie.

"Tasha was fierce and beautiful and let everyone know it. She made you work to gain her trust and love, but when she decided you were all right, it was the most rewarding thing on earth. The zoo will not be the same without her. Luckily, she lives on through her many descendants, especially the females as they show her fierceness and strength that she always possessed," said Katie Graves, a lead animal keeper at Woodland Park Zoo.

Tasha arrived at Woodland Park Zoo in 2011 under a breeding recommendation by the Sloth Bear Species Survival Plan. Tasha's genetics were particularly valuable because she had not given birth before; during her time here, she gave birth to and raised four healthy cubs. Species Survival Plans are cooperative breeding programs across accredited zoos to help ensure healthy, genetically diverse populations of select species or subspecies.

Sloth bears live in forests and grasslands in Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka. A vulnerable species, sloth bears' survival is challenged by conflicts with humans and animals for space and food caused by deforestation, the bear parts trade for use in traditional Asian medicines and fragmented populations. Woodland Park Zoo supports Wildlife SOS, a conservation organization in India that runs wildlife rescue centers and helps communities coexist with sloth bears and other native species. Visit www.zoo.org/donate to support Wildlife SOS.

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