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Press release

A furry Christmas present

Baby sloth bear at Zoo Berlin

In recent weeks, the bear keepers at Zoo Berlin have been hearing gentle sucking noises coming from the sloth bear habitat. On Christmas Eve, young sloth bear Kaveri (eight) gave birth to a furry bundle of joy, but the keepers have kept away until now in order not to disturb mother and cub. The baby's father is Rajath (six). He and Kaveri were both born in India and came to Berlin together on 30 July 2013.

After two months of peaceful time alone together, it was finally time for mother and child to receive a visit from the vet. On 24 February, Dr André Schüle and keeper Marko Röbbke approached the tiny bear for the first time, to microchip it and give it a dose of anti-worm medicine. The vet also took the opportunity to determine the cub's sex – the cute black bear is a boy, like his cuddly white counterpart at the Tierpark. He was very brave during the examination, and his mother Kaveri was surprisingly composed during their brief separation. Sloth bears are also called “labiated bears” for their long lips – and our baby boy is no exception with his adorable pout! Sloth bears are also known for their long claws, used for digging at termite mounds, and our little guy is already equipped with some impressive talons.

Sloth bears are only found on the Indian subcontinent – i.e. in India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh. The greatest threat to the bears is the destruction of the forests where they live – a result of enormous growth in the human population. People are using the land to grow tea, eucalyptus and teak in large monoculture plantations and this, teamed with additional encroachment of human settlements into the bears' habitat, has led to increasing conflict between humans and bears. Sloth bears have therefore been listed as “vulnerable” by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Despite the bears' threatened status, however, they are present in very few zoos in Europe because keeping and breeding them presents particular challenges. The sloth bear European Endangered Species Programme (EEP) currently includes 31 individuals, with some of those living at four German zoos. The coordinator for the sloth bear EEP is based in Münster, and Zoo Berlin's bear curator Heiner Klös is a member of the relevant Species Committee. At the end of 2015, the international sloth bear studbook listed almost 500 of the bears living in facilities. There are currently no reliable counts of the number of sloth bears in the wild.

“The birth of this infant bear on Christmas Eve is a huge win for efforts to conserve this threatened species,” smiles Zoo and Tierpark Director Dr Andreas Knieriem. “We are now trying to find a fitting sponsor for him, so that we can work together to decide on the right name.”

Besides the still-nameless cub and his parents Rajath and Kaveri, the other sloth bears at Zoo Berlin are elderly female Sutra (20) and her son Jürgen (14).