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## ***Sloth Bear Fact Sheet (5/1/94)***

### **Sloth Bear** (*Melursus ursinus*)

**Description:** The sloth bear is a medium size bear weighing between 175 and 310 pounds with a body length of between 60 and 75 inches. It has a very shaggy coat of black fur, with grey and brown hairs mixed in. On the chest there is a white or cream colored U shaped or Y shaped patch of fur. This same lighter color occurs around the muzzle and sometimes extends around the eyes. The snout is very mobile and the nostrils can be closed voluntarily.

**Range:** It is found in India, Bangladesh, Nepal , Bhutan and Sri Lanka.

**Habitat:** The sloth bear prefers grasslands and forested area at predominantly lower altitudes. It is more often found in drier forests and areas with rock outcroppings.

**Diet:** A sloth bear's diet is mostly comprised of termites for which this species is specially adapted. Its upper incisors are missing, forming a gap, and its lips can extend to form a tube. With this, the sloth bear is able to suck up the termites, making a sound that can be heard from over 330 feet away. Other items in the sloth bear diet are fruit and other plant matter, eggs, insects, honeycomb and carrion.

**Social Organization:** Little is known about this bear in the wild but it is thought that they maintain small territories and live as solitary individuals except when a female is caring for her young. They do have several specific vocalizations. What little is known about the sloth bear in the wild has often been learned from field studies done from the back of elephants.

**Reproduction:** Sloth bear mating occurs in May, June and July, with pairs forming only for one or two days. Gestation is six to seven months long and a female can produce up to three cubs, although one or two are more common. They are born in earthen dens and stay inside till two or three months old. The cubs will stay with their mother for two or three years. Mother bears are known to carry their young on their backs, the cubs using the long shaggy fur on their mother's back to hold on to.

**Conservation Status:** Sloth bears are listed as Appendix I in CITES.

**Threats to Survival:** Sloth bears face severe habitat loss and heavy poaching mainly for the medicinal market. Natural predators such as wild dogs, tigers and leopards also take a toll on juveniles.

**Zoo Programs:** A sloth bear Species Survival Plan has been granted by the AZA in 1994. The CBSG has recommended that North American zoos take the lead in an international studbook. This is currently being petitioned for the two subspecies. Two potential management units exist: one for the Indian subcontinent population and one for the Sri Lanka population. It is the recommendation of the AZA Bear Advisory Group that they be managed in the United States as one group due to the rapid and continued genetic and demographic deterioration of the captive population.

Research programs currently under way in zoos include reproductive fecal steroid work being done at the Woodland Park Zoo. Woodland Park Zoo and the USFWS forensics laboratory are working together on genetic analysis of the North American population.

This species has been recognized as one of the most threatened with extinction by the IUCN- Bear Specialist Group and therefore the AZA Bear Advisory Group will place high priority on initiating efforts to develop an in situ conservation program.

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