



**HUMANE SOCIETY
INTERNATIONAL**

Media Release

HUMANE SOCIETY INTERNATIONAL LAUNCHES CYCLING EVENT TO RESCUE INDIA'S DANCING BEARS

Sydney, 29th July 2009

Humane Society International (HSI) is seeking participants for a major fundraising challenge taking place in March 2010. The event is a bike ride from Rajasthan (near Delhi) to Agra in India to raise funds for *Wildlife SOS* to help rescue and rehabilitate India's dancing bears.

This rewarding challenge will be the experience of a lifetime. The 13 day event will average 50km a day on the dedicated cycling days. Participants will ride through Rajasthan, the quintessential Indian state, with its walled cities, forts and palaces onto the final destination of Agra. In Agra participants will visit the incomparable Taj Mahal and have a full day at a Bear Rescue Sanctuary.

"Dancing bears" are sloth bears stolen from their mothers at less than 4 weeks old. These traumatized bear cubs spend the rest of their lives tethered to a short rope, beaten and starved to perform. Our project partner, Wildlife SOS, aims to *rescue the last of India's dancing bears by the end of 2010*. **The Cycle of Hope challenge will be raising funds for this important project.**

HSI is working with a travel and fundraising partner, Inspired Adventures, to support participants before the trip with all the fundraising, training and preparation needed to complete the challenge.

HSI was established in Australia in May 1994 for the Asia Pacific region. It has over 40,000 Australian supporters with donations put immediately into animal protection, wildlife conservation and environmental programs in Australia and overseas.

To receive your free information pack and help with any questions or queries please call 02 9262 9800 or email tristanne@inspiredadventures.com.au.

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BACKGROUND: PROJECT INFORMATION

THE LIFE OF THE DANCING BEAR

The sorrow of the bear dancing begins in the forest where the cubs are stolen from their mother at less than 4 weeks old and the mother is killed.

The traumatized cubs barely survive the rough handling they undergo as they are moved in sacks from one trading market to another. After painful procedures to remove their teeth and claws, coarse ropes are inserted into their tender muzzles. They will now spend the rest of their lives tethered to a short rope, led through hot dusty streets of India, beaten and starved to perform unless we step in and help them.

CUTTING THE ROPE

In India many sloth bears spend sad and painful lives dancing for tourists and rural audiences, with a coarse rope piercing their raw infected muzzles.

HSI project partner, Wildlife SOS, has initiated a unique approach to end this cruel tradition and HSI is committed to help every bear still dancing is rescued.

To date over 500 bears have found safety in the spacious bear rescue sanctuaries. They arrive in such poor condition, usually half their natural body weight, scared and in poor health and pain.

On arrival each bear goes through quarantine and is vaccinated for a range of diseases including rabies and TB. Their wounds are treated, painful mouths and rotting tooth stumps are cared for by special dentistry work and a nourishing diet with feed additives slowly helps them put on weight and develop glossy coats.

The bears are then released in the socialisation enclosures where they slowly learn to deal with space and make friends with other bears and begin to exercise regularly. Finally they are free to roam in the forest in free ranging enclosures. We see them climbing trees, cooling off in the ponds and wrestling with each other. A well equipped veterinary team ensure their continued well-being.

HELPING THE PEOPLE

Bear dancers are very poor and most of them feel that if they could find a kinder way to survive, they would. Wildlife SOS offers them that chance by helping with start up costs and training to set up alternative ways of earning a livelihood. They also make it possible for them to send their children to school by subsidising school fees, and the women receive vocational guidance to help them contribute to the family income ensuring that the family has other options in life besides bear dancing. In this way we hope to make the bear rescue efforts sustainable and break the cycle of dancing bears permanently.

PROTECTING BEAR HABITAT

Protecting bear habitat is the only way to guarantee a future for wild sloth bear populations. Wildlife SOS buys parcels of this land so that bears and other species that depend on this habitat will survive. The areas that Wildlife SOS is seeking to protect, contain what are believed to be some of the oldest rocks in the world and are full of natural caves which are shelter for leopards, pangolin, hyenas, mongoose, turtles, otters, crocodiles and a rich array of birds. The purchase of this land creates a wildlife reserves for a whole range of animals.

A SANCTUARY OF HOPE

The aim is to rescue every last dancing bear from the streets of India and to ensure that it ends forever. As important as the care and rehabilitation of these rescued bears is, it is equally important that we end the cycle. To date not one Kalandar that has been retrained has returned to dancing bears.

They are all proud of their new lives and skills and their children are being educated and will not inherit the trade from their parents. Anti poaching work is showing extraordinary results with the number of poached bears dramatically reducing. And acquisition and protection of habitat gives the bears hope for a future in the wild.