

If you should ever see or hear of a dancing bear, please inform one of the following bodies immediately:

ARCTUROS

(Victor Hugo 3, Thessaloniki 546 25, tel. 031/554623, 555920 or 093/627852, Tel. and fax 031/553932)

The Bear Sanctuary

(Aetos Florinis 53075, Tel.-fax 0386/41500 or 093/738615)

The Ministry of Agriculture

(Directorate of Ornamental Forests, Woods and Game), Tel. 01/3606008, 3606901

The nearest forestry or police station.

The Visitor Reception Centre at the Forest Station



Restored to life



Tassoula at the Forest Station



Yiorgakis and Irini at the Forest Station



Dancing Bear

The cruel exploitation of an endangered species



A victim of «tradition»

The brown bear, symbol of the wild life in the northern hemisphere, is on the threshold of extinction. In Europe there remain only a few isolated populations. In Greece, their range has shrunk to the forests of Central and Northern Pindos and the Rhodope massif.

The principal causes of this decline in population are:

destruction of habitat
deliberate killing by man

A practice that is wrongly seen as a «picturesque tradition» is one of the principal causes of the decreasing population of this species: every dancing bear means the loss of at least two individuals, since those who go after the cubs usually kill the mother first.

The loss of female bears is catastrophic for the survival of the species, bearing in mind that:

bears have an average life span of 20-30 years

females can reproduce from the age of four

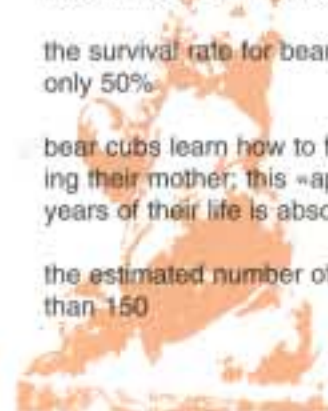
females give birth every two or three years to one or two (rarely three) cubs

new-born cubs cannot survive for more than a few minutes without their mother

the survival rate for bear cubs in their first year is only 50%

bear cubs learn how to fend for themselves by watching their mother; this «apprenticeship» in the first few years of their life is absolutely vital for their survival

the estimated number of bears left in Greece is less than 150



Training by torture

Dancing bears are kept in wretched conditions, and are horribly maltreated by their trainers:

They are taken away from their mother when only a few months old, thus putting a violent and final end to their life in the wild.

Rings are passed through their nose or lip to anchor a chain: pain is one means of exacting obedience.

Their eye teeth are smashed; the bears they will also break many of their remaining teeth in their desperate attempts to get rid of the chain.

These broken teeth are an open invitation to infection and painful abscesses, which often prove fatal.

Insufficient and unsuitable food lead to malnutrition.

«Training» consists of forcing the animal to stand on a hot metal sheet. As it tries to keep its paws from burning, it rears up on its hind legs and shuffles from one foot to the other to the sound of the tambourine. This «training» continues until the animal has associated the sound and the pain in a conditioned reflex. The combined

effect of captivity and maltreatment produces behavioural disturbances, expressed in repetitive (stereotyped), purposeless movements, that it has difficulty shaking off in the remainder of its life.

The ultimate humiliation



What is being done about this problem

Article 258 of the Forestry Code (legislative decree 86/69), paragraphs 2e and 2f, prohibits the killing, possession or public exhibition of bears.

Although the sanctions for violation of this law, which was passed in 1969, include fines, imprisonment and confiscation of the animal, it has not until recently been possible fully to apply it, given the lack of suitable shelters for confiscated animals.

ARCTUROS, in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, which is responsible for implementing the law, has made a major contribution to solving this problem, with its establishment of the Bear Sanctuary (open since 1993) as a sanctuary for confiscated dancing bears.

These bears go first to the Veterinary Centre, where they receive the necessary care and attention.

Veterinary care often necessitate delicate surgical procedures. Here the specialists at the Veterinary Centre perform a dental operation



Once the bears have been restored to health, they are moved to the Forest Station, five hectares of beech forest near Nymphaio, a specially enclosed tract of the bear's favourite natural habitats.

In this sanctuary the animals will live out the rest of their lives, always under the watchful care of their human guardians, at least as far as food supply is concerned.

This is because these animals, having lost their mother at such a young age, have never learned to fend for themselves in the wild, and thus cannot be totally reintegrated into their natural environment.



Koukia before...

and after her release into the Forest Station



Protection also means information

In addition to its fundamental contribution to solving the problem of the dancing bear, the Bear Sanctuary also serves as an information centre to increase public awareness of the important issue of protection for this endangered species.

But remember!

The fact that it is being dealt with does not mean that the problem has disappeared. The latest confiscations of animals imported from neighbouring countries prove that bears are continuing to be exploited and that this exploitation still constitutes a threat to the survival of the species. Recent reports signal the presence of bear-trainers in Greece, even today.

Simply reporting a bear-trainer is not enough. There has to be immediate mobilisation and action, if we really want to help effectively to eliminate this practice once and for all.

Visitors to the Bear Sanctuary Forest Station listen to the guide



The Bear Sanctuary Forest Station at Nymphaio, Prefecture of Florina