

Info Bulletin 4 – July 2008



Welcome

Welcome to the Alertis info-bulletin. Within this bulletin, Alertis will give regular up-dates about our main activities and about the projects, Alertis supports. We will keep it short and in case you would like to know more about any of the subjects mentioned here, you can always mail to project@alertis.nl.

Bear proof bin tested in Zoo

Newly developed garbage bins were tested in Košice Zoo (Slovakia) for their bear proofness. The first ones were easily opened by the bears but after some adaptations, the bears were not able to open the bins anymore. These bins are part of a project, which Alertis supports since 2004 and will continue to support in 2008. The B.E.A.R.S. (Bear Education, Awareness and Research in Slovakia) project is managed by Robin Rigg from the Slovak Wildlife Society (www.medvede.sk). Thanks to legal protection, the brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) recovered in Slovakia from near-eradication in the 1930s to re-occupying much of its former range. Following this successful recovery, several factors have begun to cause increased bear-human conflicts thereby threatening public support for continued protection of bears and motivation to develop management plans necessary for their long-term survival. Habitat is being lost, degraded and fragmented and poaching has increased. The level of knowledge and awareness among the Slovak public and tourists of appropriate behaviour in bear country is low. Dangerous situations arise due to poor food storage and/or waste management and deliberate luring of bears as tourist attractions. Negative aspects of bears often make news headlines, exaggerating the extent of the problems and promoting a sense of fear. The hunting lobby is very strong in Slovakia. Many hunters claim that bear-human conflicts arise because bears are "over-populated". The "solution" they propose is to increase hunting. This argument negates the feeling of personal responsibility of individuals living, working and holidaying in bear country. People therefore typically fail to use even simple preventive measures that could help avoid problems and thus increase both human safety and survival prospects for bears. Part of the BEARS project is improve awareness of waste management in relation to bears and bear safety and how use of preventive measures can reduce bear-human conflicts and thus contribute to long-term conservation of bears by reducing the need, whether real or perceived, for lethal control. The coming years more bins will be produced and promoted and distributed over the country. Furthermore, other preventive measures such as electric fences and sprays etc will be promoted.



Photo's by Robin Rigg

Management plan Brown bear Bulgaria formally approved

Only two weeks ago the National management plan was formally approved by the Biodiversity council of Bulgaria. This council advises the Minister of Environment and Water and without a positive advice the Minister will not sign the management plan. The last hurdles to take were the formulation of why, how and how many bears can be taken out the population each year. The plan was written by a working group consisting of all organizations and people who are (in one way or another) involved with bears. During several workshops many discussions were held until everybody agreed on the main issues. The final version will be printed soon and available (in English) from Balkani Wildlife Society (www.balkani.org). Now the next phase: implementing the plan can start !

This project was initiated by Alertis and Balkani Wildlife Society 3 years ago by establishing the working group and organizing the workshops. Also fieldwork to collect baseline data for the management plan was part of the project. Funds were secured from the Dutch government in the frame of the PIN and BBI-Matra program.

First bear can call home

The first rehabilitated bear cub from our project in the Carpathians (Romania) has been fitted with a GPS-GSM collar and is released in the wild again. The bear cub is one of a twin, which came to the rehabilitation center last year. Now she (and her brother later this month) will be monitored for at least two years as part of the monitoring program for rehabilitated bear cubs in Romania which Alertis started to support last spring. Leonardo Bereczky from ACNV (Association for Conserving Natural Values) has set up this special rehabilitation program in the Eastern Carpathians for orphaned bear cubs. Since 2004, already nine bears have been released and upon their release fitted with a VHF collar. Radio-tracking these animals is very difficult in the terrain but as far as known the bears have not shown any problem behaviour. The project that Alertis is now supporting, concerns the monitoring of at least eight more bears in the next two years. When the young animals are ready to be released again, they will be fitted with GPS-GSM collars. Data will be downloaded as soon as an animal is within reach of a



mobile (telephone) network, In addition, flights with an ultra light aircraft will be carried out to assess the habitat where the animals are and their closeness to human activities. At the same time a similar monitoring project with wild bears will be set up to have a scientific sound comparison of bear behaviour in the same area and habitat. There is much discussion whether rehabilitated bears do become problem bears. Therefore, data collected in this project are of paramount importance for this discussion. It would be so much better to be able to release orphaned bears in the wild again, than putting them in captivity for the rest of their lives. However, we must be absolutely sure that the rehabilitation process has no negative influence and impact on their natural behaviour.



Photo's by Leonardo Bereczky

15 years ALERTIS!

In 1993 it all started when the, then named, International Bear Foundation was established and started to build the Bear Forest in Ouwehands Zoo, Rhenen. In the Bear Forest, misused and mistreated (European brown) bears from all over the continent were rescued and taken care off. The Bear Forest is a two hectare large naturalistic enclosure which can be occupied by up to 12 - 14 bears. Due to hands-off management and a special natural diet, the bears are able to behave like real bears again. A total of 22 bear have lived (or are living) in the Bear Forest. This is of course a drop in the ocean and therefore we started more and more to support field projects related to welfare like the dancing bears project in Bulgaria. The support of conservation projects has very much increased over the past five years. Nowadays, Alertis supports some 15 different projects each year.

Campaign update bear farms in South East Asia

Up till now Alertis has gathered a huge amount of signed petitions, more than 30.000 in total!, against the abuse of bears in bear farms across South East Asia. In 2006 Alertis launched a national campaign to get attention for the problems in China and Vietnam concerning the farming of thousands of (Asiatic black) bears. The main goal of this campaign is to create awareness and get public and political attention in the Netherlands for these cruel practices. Alertis also raises funds for the newly built sanctuary for rescued bears in Vietnam which is run by the animal welfare organisation Animals Asia Foundation (www.animalsasia.org). The petitions will be handed over to the Dutch Government and Chinese Embassy in October 2008 and Alertis would like to see that they express their concern and will address this problem to their foreign counterpart in China.



Photo by Animals Asia Foundation

Information / contact

This E-Newsletter is published by **Alertis - fund for bear and nature conservation**. The purpose of this newsletter is to inform NGO's, governments, our partners and other interested parties about our mission and projects. If you have any remarks or questions regarding this newsletter or our projects, please feel free to contact us. If you do not want to receive this E-Newsletter anymore, you can contact us at: projects@alertis.nl.

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