

Animal rescuers bid farewell to India's oldest sloth bear

UNITED KINGDOM, January 21, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- · A UK NGO has joined its Indian partners in mourning the loss of a rescued dancing bear that was one of the oldest sloth bears in India.

- Gulabo was rescued from the infamous dancing bear trade and rehabilitated at the Bear Rescue Centre inside the Van Vihar National Park in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh.
- The facility is run by Indian NGO Wildlife SOS in collaboration with the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department and Van Vihar National Park authorities and funded by UK NGO International Animal Rescue.

Photos of Gulabo: <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/2nhziivvm38x28u9/AAA-CgusWlxGoWneSp2PL72ra?dl=0>

Photos of dancing bears:

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/3kujzpw5rl3dz5/AAAxGbOW48riF6AC6M_2u8_ba?dl=0

Believed to be one of India's oldest sloth bears, female bear Gulabo was receiving specialist treatment under the care of the centre's veterinary team. However sadly her old age finally caught up with her and she passed away on 9 January.

When she was rescued in 2006, Gulabo had spent nearly 20 years of her life being abused as a dancing bear. She had been caught from the wild as a cub. Once captured her muzzle had been pierced with a hot iron rod and a coarse rope threaded through it. The agony from the open wound when the rope was jerked drove the bear to try to escape the pain by standing on her hind legs – a desperate response described as 'dancing' by the Kalandar nomads who kept the bears to beg money from passersby.

Gulabo's life had been one of constant cruelty and neglect. She was deprived of a nutritious diet and proper veterinary care and, as time passed, the neglect took its toll on her health. She developed arthritis and went completely blind.

However, from her very first day at the rescue centre she was placed on a specialised geriatric care regime. Her diet included regular doses of multi-vitamins and immunity-boosting

supplements which steadily helped Gulabo recover and find a new lease of life. She seemed to relish every moment of her long and happy retirement alongside the other rescued bears at the centre. She loved to bask in the sunshine almost as much as she enjoyed eating, particularly when mangoes or grapes were on the menu. She would rattle the gate of her enclosure impatiently minutes before each mealtime.

After many peaceful, pain-free years, Gulabo's regular medical check-ups became even more frequent after she experienced a minor epileptic fit. She was diagnosed with intermittent epilepsy and put on anti-epileptic medication.

However sadly Gulabo's age did finally catch up with her and on 9 January she passed away in her sleep. She will be particularly sorely missed by Ubed, her caregiver. Over the years, he had formed a very special bond with his beloved bear, after devoting hours every day to building up her trust and helping her recover from the trauma of her past. Ubed was by her side until the end.

The practice of dancing bears was a centuries-old tradition that inflicted terrible cruelty on thousands of sloth bears in India. From 2002-2009 International Animal Rescue worked in coalition with Wildlife SOS to bring an end to the exploitation by building rescue facilities for the bears and providing alternative livelihoods for the Kalandars who depended on the bears to earn a living. Although their days of 'dancing' and performing were brought to an end, sadly the bears were no longer fit to fend for themselves in the wild as they all suffered from severe physical and psychological trauma, as well as chronic medical problems.

On average sloth bears can live for up to 15-20 years in the wild but under captive care they can survive up to 20-25 years. At between 35-40 years of age, Gulabo was one of the oldest living sloth bears in the country.

Alan Knight, IAR CEO said: "Gulabo's astounding longevity can be credited to advanced veterinary medicine and the excellent care provided by the vets and bear care staff at Wildlife SOS. At IAR we are proud to have played a role in the rescue of more than 600 dancing bears off the streets of India and to continue enabling bears like Gulabo to enjoy a happy and healthy retirement, thanks to the kindness and generosity of our supporters."

Dr. Rajat Kulkarni, Wildlife Veterinary Officer said, "Gulabo lived a long and healthy life in our care and would spend her days basking under the sun, almost as though making up for the lost years of rest as a dancing bear. An autopsy determined the cause of death as a failure of internal organs due to old age."

Kartick Satyanarayan, Co-Founder & CEO of Wildlife SOS, said "We are so honoured to have been a part of Gulabo's life, and to have had the chance to give her a safe and comfortable life. Our dedicated team ensured that she received the best possible medical care & treatment to the very end."

Geeta Seshamani, Co-Founder & Secretary of Wildlife SOS said, "As Gulabo leaves us with a certain heaviness in our hearts, we applaud her strength and perseverance. We find solace in knowing that she was able to live a peaceful life at Wildlife SOS, a place where she was cherished and treated with dignity."

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