



Celebration of the World Bear Day 2022 at Ratanmahal Sloth bear Sanctuary

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The World Bear Day is celebrated on 23 March each year, to recognize and encourage the conservation of the various bear species found in the world. Bear Day is celebrated to raise awareness among people about the various bears, their habits and habitats. The Wildlife and Conservation Biology (WCB) Research Foundation and Vadodara Wildlife division jointly organized the World Bear Day celebration at Ratanmahal sloth bear sanctuary in 2022. In the study area “AatmavatSarvabhuteshu” a project is currently being conducted to increase community understanding of sloth bears and improve opportunities for coexistence (Mesaria et al, 2021). This project main aim is to “explain and transfer scientific ideas to the local scientific ideas and practices with the local community, and to create and spread science-based, culturally sensitive education to school children and adults through outreach programs meant to sensitize people to the plight of the sloth bear (*Melursus ursinus*). The hope is that this message will in still more positivity and ideas of how to live with sloth bears.

In this celebration 20 volunteers from various places were encouraged to participate and conduct a sloth bear awareness drive among the children living around the sloth bear habitat. The aim of this activity was to educate the local communities and develop an effective understanding of the ecological value of their surrounding flora and fauna, as well as a sloth bear-specific education to help mediate the overlap in habitat use between locals and bears, to increase the local knowledge about sloth bears, and to decrease the instances of human-sloth bear conflict.



Figure 1: Children curiously reading a comic leaflet about the story of the Sloth bear and its related threats

As part of the celebration WCB Research Foundation educated 223 students from 1st to 12th grade and 45 teachers from six schools in the six villages located in the close proximity of the bear habitat in the Ratanmahal sloth bear sanctuary were also trained. All the schools were visited by our volunteers and engaged children with (1) activity booklets to spread awareness about the sloth bear, (2) recommendations on safe living in the sloth bear habitat through a detailed presentation with brief talk on sloth bear, followed by a documentary film and animation film on the same topic and (3) distributing bear education materials as a take-home message. Activity booklets and comic leaflets previously prepared by Mesaria et al. (2022) were distributed among the kids. An elaborated presentation on dos and don'ts in the sloth bear habitat was also provided as material. Education material, including sloth bear pocket booklets, posters regarding sloth bear, leopard and hyena, dos and don'ts when encountering a bear, food calendar of sloth bears and map of sloth bear habitat in Gujarat and India in local language, was very well received by the kids as well as their teachers.

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**References:**

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