

2016-2017 Report



Dave Garshelis



Rob Steinmetz

Co-Chairs

Dave Garshelis ⁽¹⁾
Rob Steinmetz ⁽²⁾

Red List Authority Coordinator

Bruce McLellan ⁽³⁾

Location/Affiliation

⁽¹⁾ Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Grand Rapids, MN, US
⁽²⁾ WWF-Thailand, Bangkok
⁽³⁾ Ministry of Forest, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development, British Columbia, Canada

Number of members

180



Mission statement

The Bear Specialist Group (BSG) strives to promote the conservation of bears living in their natural habitats across their worldwide distribution. We do this by gaining, synthesizing and disseminating information; aiding, promoting and supporting conservation initiatives; providing technical assistance and building capacity of those involved or interested in bear conservation; and becoming directly involved in issues that reduce threats and foster the conservation of any of the seven species of terrestrial bears.

Main activities by Key Priority Area (2016 & 2017)

Barometer of life

■ Red List

i. Seven Red-List accounts completed, which resolved some problems with maps, and additional corrections were made after publication due to errors arising from SIS issues. (KSR #1)

■ Scientific meetings

i. 100 people attended a 3-day knowledge-sharing symposium on Sun Bears *Helarctos malayanus* in Kuala Lumpur co-organized by the BSG; this was the first-ever symposium devoted to this bear species. (KSR #28)

Capacity building

■ Communication

i. Two business meetings for BSG members, attended by 100 people in Anchorage (2016) and 70 people in Quito (2017) were held to discuss what the SG has accomplished as well as future plans. (KSR #28)

■ Scientific meetings

i. Formal paper sessions were presented at international bear conferences. In 2016, 14 BSG members presented on the topic: "Informing the Conservation of the World's Bears" and,

in 2017, 15 BSG members presented papers answering the question: "Is Conservation Advancing?"

ii. Keynote conference talk by D. Garshelis at International Bear Conference in Quito (2017) on: "Lack of knowledge on the four tropical bears is killing them."

Communications

■ Communication

i. Produced three issues of the BSG newsletter annually, each including a column from the Co-Chairs, plus 5-6 articles from BSG members. (KSR #28)

ii. The recent separation of the BSG from its historic host (the International Bear Association (IBA) website) meant that a new website needed to be constructed. A working group was formed to help with this task. (KSR #28)

iii. Bears have received regular media attention including, for example, follow-up on the down-listing of the Red List status of the Giant Panda *Ailuropoda melanoleuca*, bear attacks worldwide, and various site-specific conservation issues. (KSR #28)

■ Membership

i. In a constructive review of the membership, 70 inactive members were removed with ample notice.

Conservation action

■ Conservation activities

i. A workshop was held in Quito, Ecuador (Nov 2017), to strategize mitigating human-bear conflicts. Sixty participants brainstormed the contents of a human-bear conflict manual, and how to prioritize actions related to conflicts. (KSR #15)

ii. A two-day conservation planning workshop was held for Sun Bears in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (Sep 2017). Thirty participants attended, including field researchers, conservationists,

Brown bear on Tibetan Plateau
Photo: Li Sheng



representatives from the *ex-situ* community and governments from Sun Bear range states. The workshop was facilitated by Caroline Lees from the Conservation Planning Specialist Group. (KSR #15)

iii. Following the meeting above, a core group drafted a conservation action plan for Sun Bears, which was subsequently reviewed by participants of the symposium and relevant experts, and revised accordingly. (KSR #15)

■ Technical advice

i. The BSG is continuing to provide technical inputs to the bear farming situation analysis. This situation analysis was a Recommendation from the IUCN World Conservation Congress (WCC) in Jeju, 2012. The BSG also helped write the summary of work accomplished so far for the WCC in Hawaii, 2016, and continues to link closely with the ongoing work. (KSR #27)

Increasing diversity of SSC

■ Membership

i. We added 60 new members to the group, with a focus on countries with little or no representation, and conservation or government organizations that we did not already have. We now have 61 of the 66 bear range countries represented.

Policy

■ Policy advice

i. The BSG sent an official letter to the Italian Government regarding the dispatching of a bear (in a small population in the Alps) following the bear's attack on two people. The killing of the bear received negative media attention, instigated by groups lobbying to bring the bear into captivity. The purpose of the BSG letter was to acknowledge support of the government's decision, with an offer to provide advice on similar issues that may arise in the future. (KSR #26)

■ Synergy

i. Collaborated with the Bear Taxon Advisory Group and other *ex-situ* groups on bear conservation initiatives and messaging. The BSG also worked with captive groups on various topics such as how zoos can contribute to conservation, what to do with confiscated bears, and conservation in US national parks. (KSR #29)

Acknowledgements

We thank the donors who covered the costs of the Sun Bear Symposium and Conservation Planning Workshop (Kuala Lumpur, 2017): Wildlife Reserves Singapore, Perth Zoo Wildlife Conservation Action, Taronga Conservation Society Australia, Bornean Sun Bear Conservation Centre, Hauser Bears, and the International Association for Bear Research & Management (IBA). We thank IBA for a close affiliation on bear conservation, hosting an annual conference where the BSG can participate, and for providing research and conservation grants to individual BSG members.

Targets for the quadrennium 2017-2020

Barometer of life

Red List: Red Listing at the population level for some distinct populations of bears.

Research activities: (1) finish bear farming situation analysis; (2) peer-reviewed paper on Asiatic Black Bear *Ursus thibetanus* range map.

Capacity building

Capacity building: Programme Officer (needed).
Proposal development and funding: generate clear ideas on long-term funding base (where to keep funds, methods of raising funds).

Communications

Communication: (1) new website for BSG (in process); (2) continuation of newsletter with articles on bear conservation.

Conservation action

Conservation activities: start implementing Sun Bear action plan.

Proposal development and funding: conservation priority-setting both within and among species.

Technical advice: mitigate bear-human conflicts on the Tibetan Plateau.

Policy

Communication: position statement on bear collaring.

Conservation activities: (1) Sun Bear action plan; (2) Sloth Bear *Melursus ursinus* action plan; (3) human-bear conflicts manual.

Projected impact for the quadrennium 2017-2020

By the end of 2020, we will be implementing the conservation action plan for the Sun Bear and Sloth Bear, and thereby making strides toward reducing threats impacting these two species. For the Asiatic Black Bear, we will have completed the work to fulfil the IUCN Recommendation "Bear farming in Asia" with respect to the situation analysis called for in the Recommendation. In addition, we will have firm recommendations to the Chinese government pertinent to the conservation of this species. For brown bears we anticipate having better information on the population status in central Asia, and to be progressing well with the mitigation of human-bear conflicts on the Tibetan Plateau.

Summary of activities (2016-2017)

Key Priority Area ratio: 6/7

Key Priority Areas addressed:

- Barometer of life (2 activities)
- Capacity building (3 activities)
- Communications (4 activities)
- Conservation action (4 activities)
- Increasing diversity of SSC (1 activity)
- Policy (2 activities)

Main KSRS addressed: 1, 15, 26, 27, 28, 29

KSR: Key Species Result