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## Bornean Sun Bear Conservation Centre in Malaysian Borneo

Siew Te Wong, Founder and CEO  
Bornean Sun Bear Conservation Centre  
Email: wongsiew@hotmail.com  
Website: <http://sunbears.wildlifedirect.org>

### Introduction

The Bornean Sun Bear Conservation Centre (BSBCC) is a new facility being developed in Sandakan city, Sabah, Malaysian Borneo. In Sabah, these bears continue to be threatened by forest degradation and habitat loss, illegal hunting for bear parts and to protect crops, and poaching to obtain young cubs for the pet trade. As a result of these threats, there are over thirty young sun bears currently living in unnatural captive conditions throughout Sabah, with no access to outdoor areas. The goal of the new BSBCC is to promote Malayan sun bear conservation by (1) creating the capacity to confiscate, rehabilitate and release suitable orphaned and ex-captive bears back into the wild; (2) providing an improved long-term living environment for captive bears that cannot be released; and (3) educating the public and raising awareness about this little known species through visitor programs, outreach and support for further research.

### Project Background

The BSBCC was established as a Malaysian NGO in 2008. The first stage of the project is to build a bear rescue facility to house and rehabilitate rescued bears in their natural habitat. This Centre will be located directly adjacent to the world-renowned Sepilok Orang Utan Rehabilitation Centre (SOURC), on land donated by Sabah Wildlife Department and several hectares of adjacent forest donated by the Sabah Forestry Department. The BSBCC will contain

large forest enclosures in existing primary forest in order to provide a natural environment better suited to

the needs and welfare of the bears and to facilitate the rehabilitation, training and return of individuals to the wild. The Centre also aims to provide critical outreach, information and educational materials about the sun bear to promote knowledge and awareness of this little known species locally, regionally and internationally, and serve as a base for continued sun bear research in Sabah. Once the Centre is up and running, a reintroduction facility will be set up in a protected forest area to allow soft-release of suitable rehabilitated bears back into the wild.

The construction of the BSBCC facility has been broken up into three phases to expedite completion of at least one new bear house and outdoor area. Phase I is the construction of a 20-bear house and fenced enclosures. Phase II is the renovation of the existing bear building to include office space, a visitor center, and quarantine and kitchen area, refurbishment of boardwalks, and construction of a viewing platform and educational exhibits. Phase III is the construction of a second bear house and fencing for 16 additional bears.

### Project Status

BSBCC took over operations and care for 11 captive bears living in the existing indoor rescue facility on the BSBCC site in early 2009. Staff provide focused enrichment to relieve stress and boredom and to begin teaching important sun bear skills. Three indoor play/exercise areas were created and filled with enrichment items to mimic the bears' natural habitat, including woods, logs, a rock pool, a water tank, dried leaves, and



decayed wood with termites. Staff also provide various food items as incentives for exploring all the enrichment items and to help encourage basic skills such as foraging, digging and climbing. In May 2009, one additional bear was rescued and moved to the existing facility, making a total of 12 bears under BSBCC care.

Full funding was secured for Phase I design and construction in late 2008, and construction began with an official ground-breaking in July 2009. The ceremony was attended by the

Directors of the Sabah Forestry and Wildlife Departments and the Sabah Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Environment.

Construction has progressed smoothly and on schedule, with a final completion date of February 2010. The bears will be transferred into the new facility in early March. It is anticipated that additional bears living in the most dire conditions will be confiscated and moved into the new facility shortly thereafter. Once the bears have settled in and adjusted

to the forest enclosures and fencing, more intensive rehabilitation evaluations and efforts will begin.

BSBCC is now fundraising for Phase II and once full funding is achieved, renovation of the old bear house into a visitor facility, kitchen and quarantine area, as well as construction of a viewing platform and educational exhibits, will begin. Once Phase II is completed, the facility will be ready to open to the public and begin on-site education and awareness programs. ■

## Americas

### The 3rd International Bear-People Conflicts Workshop

John Hechtel  
Email: john.hechtel@gmail.com

The 3rd International Bear-People Conflicts Workshop was held in Canmore, Alberta from 15-17 November 2009. The workshop was followed by an additional 1-day polar bear-human conflicts workshop co-sponsored by World Wildlife Fund and Polar Bears International. The previous conflict workshops were held in 1987 at Yellowknife and in 1997 at Canmore.

Workshop sessions offered brief remarks by experts followed by discussions. The sessions included Bear Behavior, Bear-Human Conflicts Updates, Managing Bears, Managing People, Attractant Management, Education and Training, Deterrent and Detection Tools, Community-based programs, and Risk and Liability. There were also two evening sessions: Pepper Spray and Firearms, and Diversionary Feeding. Participants remarked about the high number of innovations in both tools and management in all areas of conflict management. If funds permit, we are also hoping to provide written summaries

of the workshop presentations and discussions.

When our small organizing committee started planning for this in Fall 2008, we worried about getting enough people to cover the cost of the facilities. Our fears were unjustified and over 170 people attended, even though many interested people couldn't get agency permission or funding for travel. It was encouraging and impressive that many people felt it was important enough to pay their own way. There appears to be a growing need for bear conflicts managers to share their experiences and learn successful approaches.

Now that the workshop is over, the bear-human conflicts community needs to find better ways to network and share information between these infrequent meetings. When asked about priority actions, participants expressed a desire for a professional forum for bear conflict managers and to develop a set of training standards. Some of us will be working on these tasks in the coming year.

The amount of work that goes into putting on these meetings is never fully appreciated until they are over. Hal Morrison and Sandra MacDougall have shouldered most of the burden and they deserve special thanks. They and the rest of the organizing committee were exhausted but very pleased with the results of the work-

shop. The tireless professionals and volunteers devoted to conflict reduction are truly inspiring.

If you were unable to attend and want more information on the workshop, future networking or developing training standards, you can contact me. ■

### Northwest Arctic Bear Safety Initiative

Marci Johnson, Biologist  
Western Arctic National Parklands  
PO Box 1029, Kotzebue, AK 99752  
(907)442-8313  
(907)442-8316 fax  
Email: marci\_johnson@nps.gov

Responding to concerns from residents in the village of Noatak, Alaska (adjacent to Cape Krusenstern National Monument and Noatak National Preserve), the National Park Service will install electric fencing around fish drying racks in 2010 to help reduce bear-human conflicts. Recommendations from others regarding fencing supplies and manufacturers, using net fencing or rigid panels on rubber mats with a gravel substrate, success with D-cell battery operated chargers or newer solar units under the midnight sun, and programs to involve students would be appreciated. ■