

BEAR NECESSITIES!

NG KiDS gets up close to the smallest bears on the planet...

At just 1.5m in height, Bornean sun bears are the tiniest (and quite possibly cutest) bears in the world. We headed to the Bornean Sun Bear Conservation Centre (BSBCC), in Sabah, Malaysian Borneo, to find out more about these adorable animals!



It's Gloria!

Claw-some!

"Sun bears spend much of their day up trees," says Gloria Ganang, from the BSBCC. "They will climb 20–40m to find fruit and insects to eat, search for honeybees, or sleep." Their large curved claws help them cling onto tree trunks – but the bears also use them, along with their huge teeth, to tear open tree trunks to get to bees' nests hidden inside!

Friends of the forest

Often described as 'forest engineers', sun bears play an important role in keeping their environment healthy. "They eat hundreds of different types of fruit," explains Gloria, "and as they travel around they poop out the seeds, ensuring new fruit trees grow!"

The holes they make in tree trunks while looking for honey become nesting sites for birds such as hornbills, or small mammals like flying squirrels. The bears also look for beetle grubs and earthworms in the soil, and as they dig the soil is turned over, spreading the nutrients around. Brilliant!

Top tongues

Their humongous 20–25cm tasters (try comparing that to yours!) are perfect for licking honey out of bees' nests or slurping up termites from leaves and tight crevices. Yum!



Bornean sun bears are about the same height as a 12-year-old kid – that's half the size of other sun bears!

Sun bears are named after the yellow, spotted 'rising sun' mark on their chests. In the wild, sun bears spend 2–3 years learning survival skills from their mums.



Sun bears love life up in the trees!



Each bear's yellow chest mark is completely unique

Wild animals, not pets

"Sadly, the fact Bornean sun bear cubs look so cute is a big problem!" explains Gloria. "All the sun bears that we're looking after here at the Conservation Centre were originally kept illegally as pets. Their mothers were killed before they were stolen, and then the cubs were tied up in chains or forced to live in small cages. They've experienced lots of stress."

Bad medicine

As well as the illegal pet trade, sun bears are threatened by habitat destruction and by poachers who illegally hunt the animals for their meat or for use in traditional 'medicines'.

"Their claws, teeth and skin are also prized as decorations," says Gloria. Thankfully the BSBCC is working hard to educate local people, businesses and kids about animal welfare. In Sabah, the penalty for owning or harming a sun bear is five years in prison.

Conservation kings

The 43 rescued bears at the BSBCC learn all the skills that will be needed for survival in the wild, from climbing and nest building to foraging for food.

"Our aim is for these animals to regain the lifestyle of healthy wild bears," Gloria says. Each bear is closely monitored, and the centre's researchers then identify the ones they think might be ready to return to the wild.

"Two females called Damai and Debbie were recently released into Sabah's Tabin Wildlife Reserve," says Gloria. "Some, sadly, are too traumatised by their experiences to ever go free. But when that happens we make sure that they have a good, permanent home here at the centre." Great work, guys!

Want to help Bornean sun bears? You can adopt one at bsbcc.org.my/adopt