

Newspaper Article –

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The lush and peaceful yard that many of us know as the home to a sleepy, roly-poly Asiatic black bear has changed. On the surface it didn't take much to turn the yard into a hub of activity. But as the single Asiatic black bear moved to Zoo Boise and two young sloth bears arrived from Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle, Washington, staff knew they were in for a new adventure.

The adventure started a number of months earlier when the management committee of AZA's (Association of Zoos and Aquariums) Sloth Bear SSP (Species Survival Plan) were reviewing their masterplan. The goal of the SSP is to make recommendations regarding the animals in zoos that will keep the population healthy and reproductive. The predicament they discovered centered around a genetically valuable female sloth bear located at Zoo Boise. The population would benefit greatly if she produced cubs but her current home was only big enough for one. The committee members thought and thought, trying to find a way to get this female together with a male but there just didn't seem to be room. Then someone thought of Lee Richardson Zoo.

Our bear exhibit in the "Wild Asia" area of the zoo might be the answer they were looking for. With room for two, either sloth bears or Asiatic black bears would fit the zoogeographic theme of Wild Asia (they're both Asian bear species) so the switch would be within the guidelines of zoo's collection plan. With the seed of an idea, the phone calls and e-mails started flying.

When we received the call about the proposed change, we had many things to consider: Would the move work well for our Asiatic black bear? Would we be able to help by bringing sloth bears to Lee Richardson Zoo? After much discussion we agreed to participate in the switch.

Three zoos would be involved if the plan were to come together: Zoo Boise, Lee Richardson Zoo and Woodland Park Zoo. Woodland Park Zoo was home to the male who was to be matched with the female sloth bear. Zoo Boise, with room for one Asian bear would provide a new home for our Asiatic black bear. (Due to the current population within AZA zoos this species is not a focus for reproduction like some other species such as sloth bears.) Now that the three zoos were on board, an informational exchange took place. Diet, behaviors, likes/dislikes and more about the bears involved were sent between zoos. Upon review of the behaviors of the female sloth bear, it was decided to put the pair together at Woodland Park. They had the facility and the experience that would give the pairing the greatest chance of success. In order to make room for the new pair in Seattle, two young male sibling sloth bears who had been born at that facility were to be moved to Garden City.

With the basic plan in place, now the details had to be worked out. When could the three zoos make the moves? The bears had to have pre-shipment medical tests, shipping crates had to be found and travel arrangements had to be made. Once the details were taken care of the only thing left was to do the deed. The female sloth bear was moved from Boise to Seattle. The staff at Woodland Park Zoo loaded up their two charges and headed for Kansas. As they came to the end of the first leg of their long journey, staff at Lee Richardson Zoo were loading the Asiatic black bear into a travel crate. The sloth bears were unloaded and the Woodland Park Zoo staff headed back with the bear for Zoo Boise. All bears arrived at their new facilities without a hitch.

Now each zoo moved on in their own way to become acquainted with their new charges and to acquaint the bears with their new homes. If at any time questions arise, each zoo knows that staff at the “home zoo” of the new bear(s) is just a phone call away. A couple of days after their arrival at Lee Richardson Zoo the two young sloth bears ventured outside into their new exhibit for the first time. The first words used to describe these boys wouldn't be sleepy or roly-poly. They have rearranged some of the lush grass and are checking out everything in their new enclosure. Each one has his own personality but they both bring with them lots of activity and hours of viewing pleasure for our visitors.

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