

# Sloth Bear

*Melursus ursinus*



**Class:** *Mammalia*

**Order:** *Carnivora*

**Family:** *Ursidae*

**Characteristics:** Sloth bears are unique looking bears. These are mostly black bears with a V or Y whitish cream marking on the chest. The fur is long and shaggy. The long muzzle is also pale in color, mostly due to lack of fur in the area. Sloth bears have very long, flexible lips that are adapted for their diet of insects. They have very long claws for digging. Sloth bears are sometimes also called honey bears or lip bears. ([Arkive](#)) This species has the ability to close its nostrils so ant, termites, dirt, or bees do not get into the nose. These are medium size bears at about 5-6 feet long, 2-3 feet high at the shoulder, and weigh 120-310 pounds. ([National Zoo](#))

**Behavior:** Sloth bears are solitary creatures, living alone except during breeding season. They are generally nocturnal, especially when living in an area near humans. These bears have been seen [climbing high up trees](#) to knock down a honeycomb. ([National Geographic](#)) Sloth bears will stand on their hind legs and vocalize if threatened. They are not afraid to defend themselves against tigers, leopards, or humans. ([Animal Diversity](#)) These bears use their long claws to [tear into termite mounds](#), then [suck in](#) to vacuum up all the insects within. ([Arkive](#))

**Reproduction:** Sloth bears only come together during breeding season. The female uses delayed implantation to decide the best time for her pregnancy and birthing. The female will then remain in a den for 6-7 months until she gives birth. The most common number of cubs is 2. After the mother and cubs leave the den, the cubs will [ride on the mother's back](#) and cling to her long fur. No other bear species does this. As they grow, the cubs will begin to walk on the ground. The female nurses the cubs for one year and they will stay with mom for up to 2.5 years. ([San Diego Zoo](#))

**Diet:** Wild: Fruits, ants, termites, honeycombs, and other insects  
Zoo: Omnivore diet, dog food, beef bones, eggs, vegetables, fruits, honey

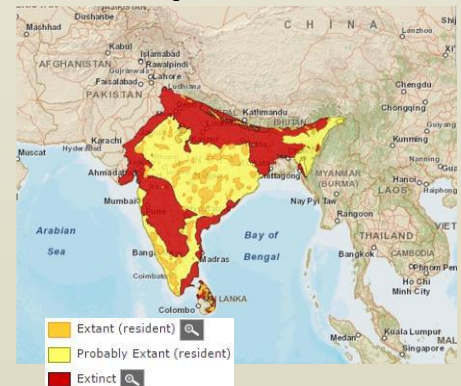
**Conservation:** [IUCN Redlist](#) of endangered species considers sloth bears to be vulnerable. Population estimates suggest less than 20,000 sloth bears remain in the wild after a 30-49 percent decline in the last 30 years. This decline is mainly due to habitat loss, poaching, trade, and lack of conservation efforts.

**FYI:** The character Baloo in *The Jungle Book* is based on a sloth bear. ([National Zoo](#))



## Range & Habitat:

Most common in lowland forests of India and Sri Lanka. Some bears in Nepal, and Bhutan



**Lifespan:** up to 40 years in captivity, average 16 years in the wild.

**Special Adaptations:** Sloth bears lack upper incisors which allow them to easily suck up insects.

## IUCN Conservation Status:

Vulnerable

