

Background to the sanctuary

Some 5,500 European brown bears live in the wild in Romania – approximately 50% of the European bears population outside Russia. Hunting is a legal and popular sport and bears are hunted by Romanian as well as foreign sport hunters. There is also a high incidence of bear-human conflicts occurring throughout the country due to the bears' natural habitat, the Carpathian Mountains, running through the centre of Romania and having towns and cities encroaching on this habitat.

Bears caught or killed as Game animals or 'pest' animals are often mother bears with cubs. There has been a tradition of orphaned cubs being caught and kept in captivity for private or commercial use. At the time of this project's inception (Spring 2005) there were estimated to be around 50 bears being kept in poor captive conditions. Some were being used as attractions in front of restaurants and ski centres, while others were caged in private back gardens. A few were still being used as tourist attractions on the streets where tourists pay to take a photo of the bear. All of these bears are being kept illegally.

The animals all suffer from poor living conditions. Most bears live solitary lives in cages with only a few square metres of floor space. There is rarely any shelter from the weather and food consists of bread, corn and little else apart from odd scraps. The bears investigated by WSPA show signs of abnormal behaviour due to the cramped and sterile environments, and are generally underweight with matted fur. There is no indication of any veterinary care being provided for these captive animals.

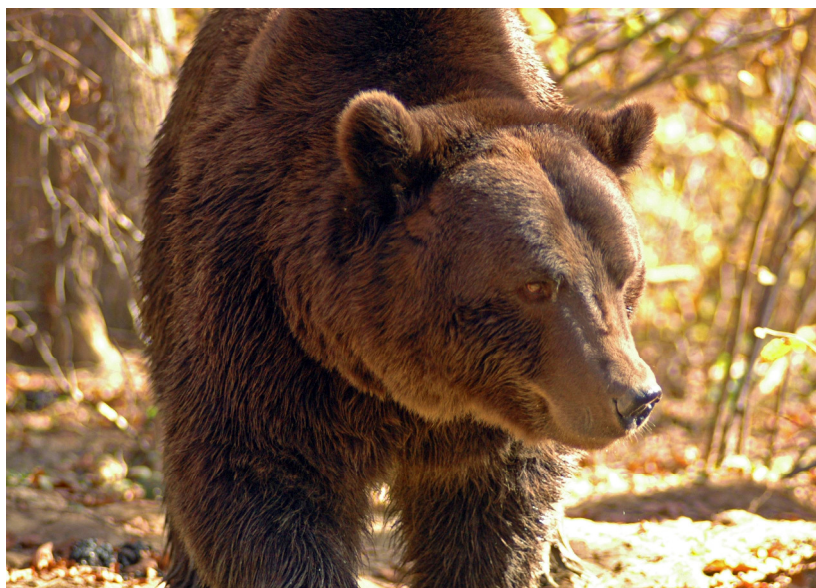
The Romanian bear sanctuary is the largest facility in Europe capable of caring for rescued and confiscated bears. There are an estimated 25 bears that still need rescuing in Romania and once they are all taken there may be opportunity to use the facility to house rescued bears from neighbouring countries.

Lydia the bear in a temporary cage after arrival at the Sanctuary



There are 25 rescued bears living in quarantine cages or in the forest enclosures of the sanctuary which have been rescued from poor captive conditions around the country.

WSPA's local member society (Milioane de Prieteni) who are managing the bear sanctuary, are making excellent progress with Romanian authorities to ensure that Romanian law is used and enforced to eradicate the illegal keeping of bears in captivity.



The rehabilitated bear, Christi, at the Sanctuary