

Captive Bear Welfare Issues



A pet bear confined to a grossly undersized cage on the back of a trailer in an Ohio backyard.



A bear with large clumps of matted fur clinging to her in late July because the cage has no pool and nothing for her to rub against to help her shed properly.



Bears kept in a muddy, undersized enclosure.



A bear sits bored in a small, barren concrete cage—typical inhumane conditions at roadside zoos.

Bears are among the most challenging species to keep humanely in captivity. Bears are intelligent, possess great strength and dexterity, and are active for up to 18 hours a day, spending much of their time foraging and exploring. Wildlife biologists and other experts have learned a great deal about wild bear behavior, social structure, and habitat requirements, and professional facilities recognize the need to incorporate this information into captive bear husbandry practices in order to provide bears with more mentally-challenging and physically-stimulating environments.

Minimum Requirements for Captive Bears

- A large enclosure, preferably measured in acres rather than feet
- Natural substrate, such as soft earth, grass, and mulch that provides opportunities to dig
- Boulders and logs to rub against
- A pool large enough to submerge
- Denning areas and materials for nest building
- Climbing structures and hammocks
- Visual barriers that provide privacy from the public and other bears
- Environmental enrichment that provides sensory stimulation, foraging opportunities, and materials to investigate and tear apart—offered frequently throughout the day to alleviate boredom and to encourage exercise
- A varied diet that includes fresh, seasonally-available produce presented in a stimulating manner in order to encourage foraging behavior
- Opportunity to den-up during the winter

Typical Sub-Standard Living Conditions for Captive Bears

- Small, barren enclosure, often 20-feet by 20-feet or less, with a concrete floor, hard-packed earth, or muddy substrate
- No stimulation of any kind
- Fed dry dog food once a day
- Cubs prematurely pulled from their mothers and used for public handling—a common practice at substandard facilities that causes health problems
- Unwanted captive black bears, including those used in cub handling operations, may be slaughtered for the exotic meat market and/or the illegal trade in bear gallbladders

Problems Caused by Unhealthy Living Conditions

Forced inactivity due to extreme confinement, as well as standing and walking on a hard surface such as concrete day after day, can cause foot, joint, muscle, and circulatory problems; worn, cracked, and ulcerated footpads; poor muscle tone; and overall poor physical fitness. When confined to enclosures devoid of natural elements and adequate space, bears quickly become stressed, frustrated, and bored. Captive bears are especially likely to exhibit neurotic behaviors such as pacing, walking in circles, rolling or bobbing their heads, or swaying from side to side, which zoo visitors often misinterpret as “dancing.”



Weak Animal Protection Laws Cause Immense Suffering in Captive Bears

**York,
Pennsylvania**

Jim Mack's Ice Cream shop exhibits a black bear named Ricki as a curiosity display in a small cage near its parking lot. Day in and day out, Ricki paces 12 steps along the length of her cage, rolls her head in a stereotypic manner, and turns to walk 12 steps back.

Greenwich, Ohio

Following the death of two pet bear cubs from suspected dehydration, dozens of animals were confiscated from a home where they were living in filthy conditions with feces everywhere, a strong stench, and insufficient water.

**Benton County,
Minnesota**

Sheriff's deputies discovered a pet female black bear cub who was chained to a line between two trees, in a collar that was so tight it was growing into her skin. The bear had burrs matted into her fur, a ring of open sores around her neck, and she was less than half of the size she should have been for her age.

Marengo, Ohio

A bear was kept for weeks in a cage that was barely bigger than the animal on the back of a trailer before being moved into a garage.

**Solsberry,
Indiana**

Responding to a report of abandoned animals, sheriff's deputies entered a home and discovered a 3-month-old bear cub on the living room floor. A veterinary exam determined that the cub was severely neglected and in critical condition – the animal was having seizures, was malnourished and dehydrated, suffered severe anemia, and had a lack of body fat.

**Fayetteville,
North Carolina**

A black bear named Ben spent six long years at a roadside zoo called Jambbas Ranch before a judge ordered his transfer to a sanctuary. At Jambbas, Ben was confined to a barren 12-foot-by-22-foot cage made of concrete and chain-link. He was fed dry dog food, which was dumped onto the same concrete floor where he urinated and defecated.

**Cherokee, North
Carolina**

Cherokee Bear Zoo and Chief Saunooke Bear Park display neurotic, hungry bears in desolate concrete pits in which they pace back and forth, walk in endless circles, cry and whimper, and beg for tourists to toss them a morsel of food. A number of bear experts have expressed grave concerns about the sensory-deprived conditions at the Cherokee bear facilities.

