

## The Andean Bears at Inkaterra Machu Picchu Hotel



In recent decades, agricultural development and the growth of the human population in South America's Andes Mountains has severely affected the natural habitat of the Andean Bear (also known as the Spectacled Bear or the Bear with a Marked Forehead), putting it in danger of extinction. It is considered a vulnerable species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and is included in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). It is the only species of bear in South America.

Different pre-Columbian cultures, including the Inkas, considered large animals like the condor, the jaguar and the Andean bear to be magical, believing them to have a connection with the divine. In those times—hundreds and thousands of years ago—Andean bears enjoyed extensive ecosystems of cloud forests in the high rainforest and even in the Andean paramo, where they found abundant food, such as fruits, berries, roots, bark, leaves, mushrooms, as well as insects, honey, reptiles, fish, rodents, rabbits or pigeons, which constituted their food, which they could obtain without any problem. Their feeding habit is to climb up into trees, which makes it the largest arboreal mammal in the neotropics.



The Andean Bear and the cloud forest share a symbiosis that helps conserve and extend the life of the trees and plants in these beautiful ecosystems. The bears are excellent pollinators because the pollen of the species upon which they feed gets transferred on their fur, spreading it throughout the forest to increase the vegetal life of the ecosystem. They also contribute to the dispersion of species of flora when they eat seeds and then defecate, depositing the seeds on the ground to later become trees or plants, which increase to assure the cloud forests' survival.

The Andean (or Spectacled) Bears have had to survive reduction of their habitat and uncontrolled hunting by big game hunters from Venezuela to Bolivia suffered in the 19th and 20th centuries. To this should be added problems from the local indigenous farmers who hunt or eliminate them when the bears invade their cultivated fields to feed on maize or other agricultural products. Consequently it is considered not only a species in danger of extinction but pollinization has diminished in the cloud forests, ecosystems that are home to important species of animals such as the Cock of the Rock, Inca Wren, Masked Fruiteater, Golden Headed Quetzal, Highland Motmot; monkeys such as the Capuchin or Weeping Capuchin, the Spider Monkey, Coati or Hog-nosed Coon, Tayra, Pudu Deer or Toy Deer, among others.



In this complicated context of South America's only bear species, the **NGO Inkaterra Asociación**, together with the National Institute of Natural Resources (INRENA), initiate the Conservation of the Spectacled Bear project by installing a Rescue Center on the Hotel Inkaterra Machu Picchu property. The first challenge appears on June 1, 2001, when the administration of the Machu Picchu Historical Sanctuary gives Inkaterra temporary custody of a little bear confiscated from the community of Willcapata in the province of La Convención-Cusco. The mammal had been housed in a tiny wooden cage with wire mesh that measured just 1.5 x 1.5 x 1.2 meters. He was found in a malnourished state and infested with internal and external parasites; his fur was dull and his skin covered with sores and wounds. He only weighed 45 kilos. Inkaterra assumed the responsibility of making sure he was well fed to correct the malnutrition and began veterinary medical treatment. The bear recuperated in a few weeks, having obtained the support of various institutions like OMR in England (which helped in the construction of a new house for him). The BBC of London filmed the rescue of this bear with a presentation by the actor Stephen Fry with reminiscences about the Paddington Bear, transmitted over British television during prime time on January 1, 2002, to a large audience. November 6, 2002, the bear, now five years old and weighing 140 kilos, was transferred to his new home to have an extensive area of 2,980 square meters, with a large water fountain where he took refuge in the vegetation and built a nest with Calaguala ferns.

In February 2002, the BBC filmed the transfer of a female bear specimen weighing some 100 kilos from Abancay to the Andean Bear Rescue Center in Inkaterra Machu Picchu Hotel, achieving a good relationship with the first Andean bear rescued, who had been a resident since June 2001. The film was presented on Palm Sunday, 2002, at 7 P.M. The female, after her rehabilitation showed optimal characteristics for being reintroduced into the Machu Picchu cloud forest. Females have greater facility for adaptation to the wild environment, unlike the males who are territorial; it is not easy for them to adapt to a new surroundings.



In a similar way on November 5, 2002, an adult male specimen was welcomed at the Inkaterra Machu Picchu Hotel, 11 years old, weighing 220 kilos and 2 meters tall. He came from the National University San Antonio de Abad in Cusco where he had shared a cage with four other male adult specimens, in a much reduced living space where it was impossible to climb trees or have a life close to his natural environment. This bear now enjoys his own space, with a water fountain, a cave, ramps and tree trunks which allow him to eat 20 to 25 kilos of fruit a day and 2 kilos of meat, fish or chicken a week.



The rehabilitation of these Andean bears at Inkaterra Machu Picchu Hotel takes place in four different stages:

1. Rescue and transfer;
2. Captivity, oriented to motivating their preference for native plants so they do not have to depend on food generated by human beings;
3. Semicaptivity, where the bears enter large spaces with high and/or electrified fences for the purpose of having an isolated place away from human contact;
4. Reinsertion; recuperation having been produced (the possibility is greater for young or female bears) they will be able to integrate into their wild habitat in the cloud forest. This is a very difficult stage for adult males; because of their nature as territorial mammals, they would have to fight for their space with the dominant wild bear in the area.

Inkaterra's objective has a dual purpose, on the one hand to support *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation strategies, and on the other, to contribute to educating national and international visitors, as well as the local population. Together with the concern to conserve wild life, we must create a genetic reserve in captivity, as well as work with technologies that allow us to take care of the bear population in Peru. Finally, increased international cooperation is required in the treatment of these bears so this great mammal species in danger of extinction is correctly handled, at the moment there are only 6,000 individuals, 3,000 of which are in Peru.

