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Meeting Paddington's relative, the spectacled bear

Where to see Peru's spectacled Andean bears, the inspiration for Paddington

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The spectacled bear's numbers have dropped to between 3,000 and 6,000

By **Adrian Bridge**
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They may not wear blue duffel coats and endearingly large red hats, but there is a certain cuteness to the spectacled Andean bear to be found in deepest, darkest Peru.

The cuteness lies in those distinctive semicircular creamy white markings around the eyes; there is a cuteness, too, in their modest size (averaging 440lb, they are on the small side for bears), a soulful gaze and a fine colouring of fur that incorporates black, brown and tinges of red.

Not that young Yogui was in "stroke me I'm so cute" mode as he paced up and down in his pen in the extensive grounds of the Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel in Peru.

"It's the mating season," said José, one of the Inkaterra rangers. "And he senses the presence of a female close by."

Yogui was the first of five spectacled Andean bears to be transferred to the Inkaterra hotel as part of a project dedicated to the preservation and better treatment of a dwindling and exploited species. Its numbers have dropped to between 3,000 and 6,000 and it has often been mistreated at the hands of circus owners and others seeking an exotic form of pet.

Yogui was rescued from cruel captivity in 2001 and has since enjoyed more space, regular meals (fruits and bromeliads rather than marmalade sandwiches) and the watchful attention of skilled monitors.

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While it is unlikely that Yogui will ever be capable of being released into the wild (male spectacled Andean bears can be extremely territorial), one of the bears that has been cared for at the Inkaterra site did make a successful dash for freedom, and there are hopes that others may follow.

And besides, while Yogui is still in captivity, the conditions he enjoys in his spectacular cloud forest sanctuary in deepest, darkest Peru are considerably better than those he endured before.



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