

Rescued sun bears enjoy their first taste of freedom

Edinburgh As rain clouds scudded across the sky over the Scottish capital yesterday, two Malayan sun bears made their first public appearance at Edinburgh Zoo.

The pair — which have been named Rotana and Somnang — were rescued in Cambodia, where they were kept in a cage so small that they could hardly stand up. Their new £150,000, purpose-built enclosure at the zoo features an outdoor pool and climbing structure, honey drip, fruit shaker tree and a waterfall. And, on days of endless drizzle, the sun bears can enjoy an indoor climbing frame.

The sun bear gets its name from the white or yellowish crescent on its chest which looks like a rising or setting sun against the dark brown and black coat.

Darren McGarry, animal collection manager at the zoo, said: "Sun bears are easily recognisable not only because of their size, but [also because of] their amazingly long tongue, used for extracting honey from tree trunks."

Somnang, meaning lucky in Cambodian, and Rotana, a popular Cambodian name, are thought to be about seven years old, but they could live up to 25 years in captivity.

The pair were rescued in 2004 by the Free the Bears Fund and taken to Phnom Tamao Wildlife Rescue Centre. They are believed to have been bought from an illegal wildlife trader who probably captured them in the forest and shot their mother. The bears suffer from habitat loss because of timber harvesting and are routinely hunted to be sold as exotic pets, for use in the restaurant trade, or as a source for traditional medicine.

