

## Urgent Appeal: Agra Bear Sanctuary battles with Yamuna River Flood crisis in India

Monsoon rains in India have created a potentially challenging situation for the Agra Bear Sanctuary in India where over 270 rescued dancing bears are being rehabilitated.

The rapidly rising floodwaters of the holy Yamuna River have forced our partners at Wildlife SOS India (WSOS) to put the Agra Bear Sanctuary on high alert with the 70 odd staff of veterinary doctors and bear keepers on a round the clock vigil to ensure the flood waters do not spring any unpleasant surprises on us. They have been forced to evacuate the bears from their enclosures and move them to higher ground to keep them safe.

A similar situation arose last year, with water levels hitting the danger mark and floodwater rising almost to the rooftops of some buildings in the sanctuary. The WSOS team reacted swiftly, moving bears and supplies to dry land by boat and thanks to their prompt action, no human or animal lives were lost. However, considerable damage was done to the sanctuary, with valuable veterinary equipment ruined and buildings submerged in water and silt. The clean-up operation was time-consuming and costly and sadly the outcome could well be the same again this year.

Reporting from the Agra sanctuary, Geeta Seshamani, Co-Founder of Wildlife SOS, said today: “The floodwaters are rising really fast and we are all quite jumpy. All the bears have been moved to safety on higher grounds and to enclosures that are above the danger level, but if the floodwaters rise any further, this will lead to major problems.

“We simply have to find a permanent solution to what is clearly going to be a serious and recurring problem – and that is going to require the construction of new dens and enclosures outside the danger zone. And that means more money on top of what we need to feed the bears. I just hope we can count on the public and our supporters to keep us afloat!”

Flooding only became a problem at the Agra Bear Sanctuary following the Commonwealth Games in Delhi in October 2010 where the Games village was built on the flood plains of the Yamuna. After the building work for the Games was completed, the management of the flow of the Yamuna River appears to have been altered to prevent the athletes’ Games Village from flooding. The knock-on impact of this was felt downstream where, following heavy monsoon rains, floodgates on the river were opened and serious flooding occurred. The Yamuna River runs on the periphery of the Sur Sarovar Sanctuary where the Agra Bear Sanctuary is located and consequently a large portion of which was exposed to serious levels of floodwater.

Mary Hutton, Founder of Free the Bears Fund, said: “The alterations to the flow of the river were beyond the control of our partners at Wildlife SOS. We are committed to helping them care for these beautiful bears and are calling on our supporters and members of the public to help us provide a long-term solution to this crisis. The thought of losing any of our keepers or any of the bears in the floods is too awful to contemplate and I know Wildlife SOS will do everything it can to ensure this doesn’t happen.”

To make a donation to help keep the bears afloat, contact our Perth office on (+61) 08 92441096, [Donate](#) through our website (making a note to seller: India Flood Appeal) or post cheques marked India Flood Appeal to PO Box 1393, Osborne Park DC, WA 6916.

