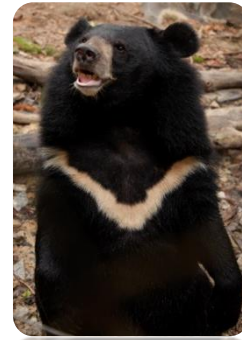


FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

MOON BEAR

(Ursus thibethanus)



*A Moon bear at the
FREETHEBEARS
Sanctuary, Tat Kuang
Si Bear Rescue
Centre, Laos*

1) What do they **look** like?

The Moon bear, also known as the Asiatic Black bear, is a medium sized bear with a body length of 140 to 165 centimetres and most weigh between 90 and 150 kilos. However, large adult males can weigh up to 200 kilos! They are normally black in colour, with lighter muzzles and a distinct V-shaped patch of cream or white coloured fur on the chest. Moon bears have a heavy, stocky body and very large, round ears.

2) Why do Moon bears have such **big ears**?

Having big ears helps Moon bears cool down if they get too hot, as the large surface area releases heat from the body quickly. Moon bears can live in freezing cold mountainous areas, or in hot and humid tropical areas, so they are very good at regulating their body temperature depending on their environment.

3) What do Moon bears **eat**?

As with other bears, Moon bears like to eat meat, but they will mostly eat plants, berries, insects, fruit and honey. Overall, Moon bears will eat anything that is edible! In autumn, they seek out nut-producing trees where they eat in leaf and branch nests or platforms that they make themselves. Moon bears are naturally poor digesters, which is functional in the wild as their droppings contain seeds from nuts and fruits that they eat which are dispersed throughout the forest

4) How did they get their **name**?

The Moon bear's scientific name, *Ursus thibethanus*, means 'Moon bear of Tibet'. The Moon bear is also known as the Tibetan Black bear or the Himalayan black bear. It is believed that the Moon bear's dark fur and the crescent-shaped, cream-coloured chest marking have earned the Moon bear its name.

5) What is a Moon bear's **special skill**?

Moon bears are quite large, but they are fearless climbers and will climb to the very top of even the skinniest of tall trees. Their strong claws and the hairless soles of their feet give them an excellent grip on any climbable surface.

6) Can Moon bears **swim**?

Moon bears are surprisingly good swimmers due to their strong forearms. They like to bathe in water, especially when the weather is hot and humid and will even put their whole heads under!

7) Are Moon bears always black?

A few blonde-coloured Moon bears have been discovered over the years, with golden fur all over their bodies and a dark brown mane around their face that gives them the appearance of a lion! Some Moon bears have yellowish fur on their faces or a dark brown tinge to their fur. These are examples of colour-phases which show up in different degrees in individual Moon bears.

8) Where do Moon bears live?

Moon bears live across more than 19 countries across eastern Asia, including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, India, Iran, Japan, Korea, Lao, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Russia, Taiwan and Vietnam. They prefer thickly forested areas in the hills and mountains and tropical forests below alpine levels. During summer, the bears may reach altitudes of 1,000 feet.

9) Do Moon bears live in groups in the wild?

Moon bears are naturally solitary and will only come together in the wild for mating. Moon bears need a lot of space to themselves and an adult Moon bear has an individual range of over 4 – 6 square miles depending on food supplies. A female Moon bear's range will be smaller than this as she will usually have cubs to care for.

10) Why do Moon bears need so much space?

Moon bears are naturally territorial and usually see other adult bears as competition for food and space. A benefit of Moon bears having a large range is that they can disperse seeds from their diet across a broader forest area, keeping the forest's biodiversity balanced.

11) What is a Moon bear's strongest sense?

Like all bears, Moon bears have an excellent sense of smell and navigate the world with their noses. They are constantly processing and exchanging 'scent information' across vast distances and this helps them to find food and mates, identify cubs and avoid danger. Moon bears breathe in deeply to get as many smells as possible from their surroundings.

12) What noises do Moon bears make?

Moon bears make a greeting noise which sounds like a clucking from the back of the throat. It is a way for Moon bears to communicate that they mean no harm to another bear so that they can avoid a fight. If Moon bears do fight, they may make roaring sounds to threaten their rival or a sudden dog-like bark if they are hurt. Young Moon bear cubs make puppy-like whimpers or humming sounds when they are comforting themselves.

13) Do Moon bears hibernate?

In the tropical Southern eastern regions of Asia, where fruit grows and trees blossom all year round there is no need for Moon bears to hibernate. However in the colder, more mountainous regions of their range such as China, Tibet and the Himalayas, Moon bears will hibernate around winter time when they retreat to their self-made dens until food supplies increase.

14) How long is a Moon bear's gestation period?

Little is known about Moon bears in the wild. However it is believed that breeding takes place over a one to two day period in late April to early June. In captivity, cubs are born in December or January. We can estimate that a female Moon bear is pregnant for around 7 - 8 months and will give birth to 2 – 3 cubs or more at a time.

15) How long do Moon bear cubs stay with their mothers in the wild?

Moon bear cubs are weaned at about six months of age but may remain with the mother for up to three years in the wild. A lot of Moon bear cubs are taken from their mothers too soon in the wild, which is dangerous for them as they need their mother's milk and more importantly, they need her to teach them how to be a Moon bear!

16) What is happening to Moon bears?

For centuries, Moon bears have been hunted for their bile which is used in Traditional Asian Medicine. While the gall bladder was traditionally removed from a dead bear, today Moon bears are kept in small cages on 'bile farms' across Asia, where the bile is extracted regularly from their gall bladders in painful and unhygienic ways.

17) How fast can a Moon bear run?

A Moon bear can reach speeds of up to 25 – 30 km/ph. They can even run on their back legs while standing up! They would usually do this when fighting or playing with another Moon bear as they use their large paws to box each other.

18) When do Moon bears sleep?

Moon bears usually sleep for around 8 hours at night, just like an adult human would. They are active during the day, but they also love to snooze at any good opportunity.

19) Is there a subspecies of the Moon Bear?

The Baluchistan bear (*Ursus thibetanus gedrosianus*) is a critically endangered subspecies of the Moon bear that is found in south Pakistan and Iran.

20) How long do Moon bears live?

The average life-span of a Moon bear is estimated to be 30 – 35 years. However, this is not confirmed by research of wild Moon bears. Perhaps they could live even longer!

The aim of FREETHBEARS is to protect, preserve and enrich the lives of bears throughout the world. Throughout Southeast Asia, FREETHBEARS has set up sanctuaries for rescued bears and continues to campaign for an end to all bear cruelty and the protection of their natural habitat.