

## PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release | February 24, 2025

Media contact: Gigi Allianic, Craig Newberry

[woodlandparkzoopr@zoo.org](mailto:woodlandparkzoopr@zoo.org)

### Media link for photos and video:

<https://zoo.resourcespace.com/?c=4180&k=0f28516a5a>

## Zoo celebrates birth of sloth bear cub

### *Cub named in honor of David Bowie*

SEATTLE—As winter hangs on and people still immerse in hygge, a mama sloth bear is denning up with her new cub, a girl! The cub was born in January to mom Kushali (kuu-SHAW-lee) and dad Bhutan (boo-TAHN). The gestation period for sloth bears is about six months.

The zoo's sloth bear team has named the cub Bowie as a tribute to the late David Bowie whose birthday is January 8, the same day the cub was born.

The last birth of sloth bears at the zoo was in 2022 when Kushali gave birth to her first offspring—a son and daughter who continue to thrive at new homes.

Woodland Park Zoo Animal Curator Martin Ramirez explained that Bowie is nursing regularly, is very vocal and has a full, rounded tummy, all positive signs she's healthy. Kushali and Bowie are currently living in an off-view maternity den for a more quiet, comfortable environment to encourage bonding and are being monitored on a den cam.

"We should begin introducing mom and cub to the public starting in April. It will be an exciting time as visitors get a snapshot of sloth bear maternal care and the fascinating adaptations of sloth bears and, we hope, take genuine interest in the species and actions to help them survive into the future," said Ramirez.

The zoo's other sloth bears, dad Bhutan and Tasha, are spending more time off view in their dens. As the weather warms up, they'll be more active and visible in their habitat in Banyan Wilds which is also home to Malayan tigers, Asian small-clawed otters and a variety of birds.

The first couple of months for sloth bear cubs are very fragile. Cubs are born extremely small and blind and weigh only about a pound. They open their eyes at about 25-35 days old and attempt to walk starting at 45-55 days. When the cubs reach about 2 months old, they'll hitch a ride on mom's back, a unique behavior that sloth bear mothers do to transport their cubs, and will ride until they're 6 to 9 months old.

According to the care team, bonding between mom and cub has been great. "Kushali is a very attentive mother. On the few occasions she has left the maternity den she isn't out for long and will quickly run back in to check on her cub, which is the kind of behavior we want to see," said Arden Robert, an Animal Care Manager at Woodland Park Zoo.

In fact, Kushali keeps such a tight paw on her cub that the care team has only been able to get their hands on her for a natal exam when she was 2 weeks old. "Kushali essentially stays with her newborn full time, so we haven't been able to do any more



wellness exams. Our animal health team, however, does visual exams regularly and the animal keepers have eyes on her daily to monitor her growth and development,” added Robert. “As a single cub, Bowie appears to be a little bigger and more plump than cubs her age because she doesn’t have to compete and share mama’s milk with any littermates—she gets milk all to herself!”

As she continues to thrive under the care of her mom, Bowie has reached a few notable milestones. Her eyes are fully open and her ears have perked up. She is now darker in color and has been observed trying to sit up on her own while supporting her weight on Kushali. The animal keepers also report that Bowie is more alert to their presence in the area.

A behavior observed by the care team is Kushali “rocking” the cub. “When the cub is fussy, Kushali places the cub on her feet and bounces her to soothe her; it’s a pretty cute, distinctive behavior,” noted Robert.

Sloth bears in zoos are rare, with 48 currently living in zoos accredited by the [Association of Zoos & Aquariums](#), and every birth of sloth bears is significant for the Sloth Bear Species Survival Plan. [Species Survival Plans](#) are cooperative breeding programs across accredited zoos to help ensure healthy, genetically diverse, self-sustaining populations of select species or subspecies.

### **About Sloth Bears**

- Sloth bears live in forests and grasslands in Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka.
- Adult sloth bears are missing their top two front teeth (incisors), which lets them suck ants and termites right out of their underground tunnels, like a vacuum cleaner! Their shaggy, dusty, black coats deflect sunlight, protecting them from the extremes of tropical heat. No wonder they’re fondly described as shaggy slurpers!
- Sloth bears forage for termites, grubs and other insects; they also eat grass, flowers, fruit, and honey plus occasional eggs and cultivated crops. At the zoo, they eat insects, honey, fruits and vegetables, eggs and omnivore chow.

### **Hope for Sloth Bears**

- A vulnerable species, sloth bears’ survival is challenged by conflicts with humans and animals for space and food caused by deforestation, the bear parts trade for use in traditional Asian medicines and fragmented populations.
- Woodland Park Zoo supports Wildlife SOS, a conservation organization in India that runs wildlife rescue centers and helps communities coexist with sloth bears and other native species. Visit [www.zoo.org/donate](http://www.zoo.org/donate) to support Wildlife SOS.
- Buy wisely. Choose [Forest Stewardship Council](#) (FSC) certified paper and wood products to protect forest habitat and wildlife. By purchasing FSC-certified forest products, consumers help to protect sloth bear habitat by encouraging sustainable forestry and limiting overharvest of forest products (timber, fuelwood, fruits and honey). Without the FSC label, timber may come from illegal logging and forests that are not responsibly managed.

Winter zoo hours: 9:30 a.m.–4:00 p.m. daily. For admission prices and tickets, visit [www.zoo.org/visit](http://www.zoo.org/visit). To learn more about Woodland Park Zoo or to become a zoo member, visit [www.zoo.org](http://www.zoo.org) and follow the zoo on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [TikTok](#).

###