

Native Range Map



## Andean Bear

Kingdom: Animalia  
Phylum: Chordata  
Subphylum: Vertebrata  
Class: Mammalia  
Order: Carnivora  
Family: Ursidae  
Genus: *Tremarctos*  
Species: *ornatus*



Photo courtesy of Linda Spatuzzi

### Habitat

- **In the Wild:** The Andean bear (or spectacled bear), native to the Andes Mountains in South America, is mainly found in or near forested mountains in Venezuela, Columbia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia. Recently, this bear has been found in the Darien Gap region bordering Columbia and Panama, as well as in Northern Argentina.
- It is generally found in a variety of habitats from grasslands to coastal scrub forests, but prefers the lush, misty ecosystem known as a cloud forest or Andean forest (elevation 5,900 ft. – 12, 500 ft.).
- **Exhibit Location:** Wildlife Trails

### Characteristics

- Body length averages 5-6 ft. (from head to tail); shoulder height averages 2-3 ft.; males weigh 220-340 lbs. and females are 140-180 lbs.
- The spectacled bear is a small bear with thick black or dark brown fur consisting of medium length hair. It has circular or semi-circular white to cream-colored facial markings around its eyes (similar to wearing spectacles or glasses). Lines and patches of this light colored fur may also extend onto the throat and chest.
- This strong, sturdy bear has a short, muscular neck. Its head is rounded and it has a smaller snout when compared to other bears. The short, strong legs have feet with 5 toes. The toes have curved, non-retractile (can not be drawn back in) claws that can be 2 inches in length. Its front legs are longer than its rear legs, which allows the bear to be an excellent climber.
- Its large molars and strong jaw muscles enable this bear to grind vegetation, which is a major part of its diet.
- **Lifespan: In the Wild** 20-25 years; **In Captivity** 25+ years (longest life span is 36 years)

### Behaviors

- Little is known of the social behavior of the Andean bear in the wild. It is thought to be a solitary animal, except for females with cubs or in estrus (reproductive period).
- The Andean bear may be the best climber of all the world's bear species. Often it will build a stick platform in tall trees. When it feeds in fruit trees, it will form its "nest" by bending back many small branches. These "nest" platforms are then used for sleeping on or for feeding from. On ground level, it may build nest-type structures made of leaves and branches. Once built, the bear may spend several days in the same nest.
- It is thought to be nocturnal (active at night). During the day, it sleeps in hidden spots such as in tree cavities, in dens dug into sides of cliffs, on its stick platforms, or on the ground level nests.
- Like all bears, it is a plantigrade (an animal that walks by placing the soles of its feet entirely on the ground). This gait supports its weight and enables it to stand up on its hind feet.
- It forages on the ground as well as feeds high up in trees. It uses its sharp claws to tear open one of its favorite foods – bromeliads (a plant of tropical and subtropical America, typically having short stems with a rose-like cluster of stiff, usually spiny leaves {example: pineapple}). Where food is plentiful, several spectacled bears may feed in close proximity with little, if any, interaction.
- In captivity, it uses a variety of calls to communicate with other Andean bears. A female and her cubs regularly communicate with each other, using two to five types of vocalizations.

- In general, the Andean bear is shy and avoids contact with humans.
- **Enrichments at the Zoo:** ice treats, hidden food on exhibit, boomer balls, trees to climb

### Reproduction

- A female Andean bear reaches sexual maturity between 4-7 years of age.
- Breeding season is from April to June. During this time, a pair will stay together for a week or two, mating frequently.
- The gestation period, which may include days of delayed implantation (the egg is fertilized, divides a few times, and then floats freely in the uterus for several months, ensuring that the young are born when food is available), is between 160-255 days. The female gives birth to a litter of 1-3 (usually 2) cubs from November to February.
- At birth, a cub's eyes are closed and it weighs about 11 ounces. After the first month, its eyes open. It is black in color and already shows the white or cream-colored facial markings that are characteristic of its species. A cub grows quickly, and weighs about 22 lbs. after only 180 days. While it is small, the cub will often be carried on the mother's back. The cub stays with its mother and litter mates for at least one year, until it gains independence and survival skills.

### Diet

- **In the Wild:** Fruits, bromeliads, berries, grasses, orchid bulbs, leaves, cactus flowers, palm fronds, tree bark, nuts, seeds, insects, small animals such as rodents, rabbits, and birds, and carrion.
- **At the Zoo:** apples, carrots, grapes, yams, oranges, omnivore diet, and dog food

### Conservation Status

- **IUCN Status:** Vulnerable (2002); **CITES** Appendix I
- The main threat is the loss of habitat due to deforestation for agriculture (timber, corn, coca, the opium poppy) and for land development (roads, highways, oil and gas pipelines, dams, high tension lines).
- The illegal hunting of these bears for their meat, skin, bones, fat, claws and other body parts is also a major threat because these parts, such as the gall bladder (used in traditional oriental medicine), bring a high price on the international market. A bear that wanders onto a farmer's land may be illegally hunted because it is viewed as a threat to livestock or crops.
- The Andean bear is part of a Species Survival Plan (SSP). Many zoos, including Rosamond Gifford Zoo, are now actively involved in maintaining the existence of this species.
- To help with conservation efforts, buy no products made from any parts of this animal.
- Cub predators: mountain lions (pumas), jaguars, humans, and adult male spectacled bears  
Adult predators: humans

### Did You Know?/Fun Facts

- Each Andean bear has its own unique set of white or cream-colored markings on its head, throat, and chest – its own “fingerprint”.
- The Andean bear has only 13 pairs of ribs compared to the standard 14 pairs in other bears.
- The Andean bear is the only surviving member of the subfamily, Tremarctinae (short faced bear). Other species in the subfamily roamed both North and South America until about 10,000 years ago.
- It is the only bear species in South America where it is the largest carnivore and the second largest land mammal next to the tapir.
- It is important to the forests because it scatters seeds through its droppings or as they fall from its fur.
- In Spanish, its common name means “bear with eyeglasses.”

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