

A Spectacled Bear's Healthy Meal



Feeding a 200kg beast is no easy task. Such is the case of five bears hosted at the Andean Bear Rescue Center, on the hotel grounds of Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel. The only bear species native to South America has a vulnerable conservation status, mainly because of hunting and loss of habitat. Inkaterra contributes to its conservation, with a program based on scientific research on Andean bears, as well as breeding and reinsertion into wildlife if conditions allow it. A proper diet is certainly one of the most important phases when achieving the proper living conditions at the Rescue Center, and it relates to other aspects such as skin care and behavior. Committed to the Andean bear's conservancy for more than a decade, ITA biologist Carmen Soto talks about what a bear should eat and the secrets of avoiding overweight.

How is an Andean Bear's meal like?

It is varied. Taxonomically speaking, Andean bears have been classified as carnivores, but their behavior is proper of omnivores. This species is mainly herbivore, as their diet includes around 95% of vegetables. These animals feed themselves from fruits, bromeliads, palm leaves, cacti, bamboo, orchids, mushrooms, honey, etc. However, they also eat eggs,

insects, small mammals (rodents, rabbits or birds), reptiles and fish. It is uncommon, but occasionally Andean bears also hunt sheep, deer or calves (it is believed that this occurs due to loss of habitat and, therefore, feeding sources). Then, the Andean bear is considered the second most herbivorous bear, behind the Panda. As a result of agroforestry, they have developed a taste for corn despite it is not one of their natural feeding sources. Now it constitutes part of their diet during the harvest season.

For the benefit of the five specimens hosted at Inkaterra's Andean Bear Rescue Center, how does diet adapt to wildlife standards?

One of the main objectives of Inkaterra Asociación (ITA) is that our bears' meals include resources that they would manage to get in the wild. With the assessment of specialists who have visited the Rescue Center, ITA has developed a proper diet. If one of our bears is apt to be reinserted into their natural habitat, then it would be able to survive in the wild as it would already know where to find food.

Are the bears fed with meat?

Andean bear need a source of protein, but it is only 5% of their diet. Protein is needed for the formation and growth of tissue, and to obtain it they tend to dig the ground in search insects, such as beetles. Occasionally they get rodents, rabbits, reptiles, birds, fish, or eggs.

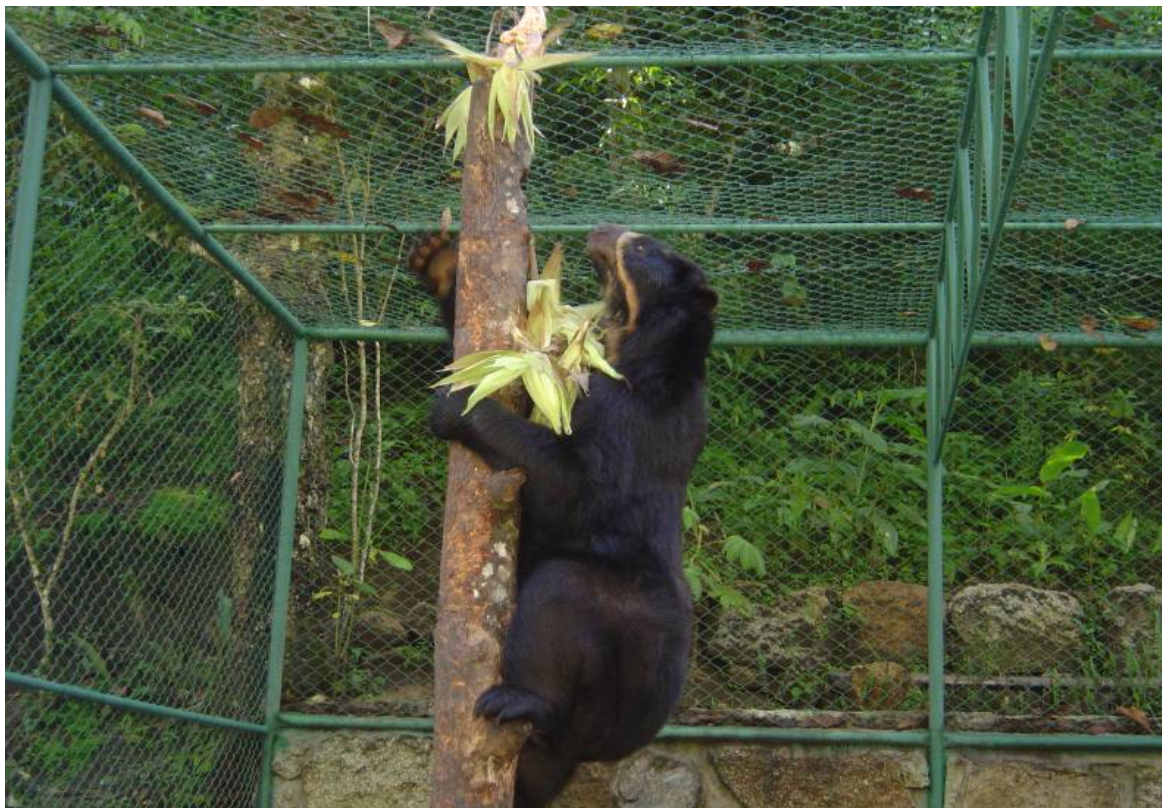


How many calories does a bear consume at the Rescue Center?

Living in proper conditions, an adult bear in captivity consumes between 3100 and 5700 kilocalories each day. Diet at the Rescue Center basically consists in fruits and vegetables. On a weekly basis, the two females eat 8 kilos each, and 10-13 kilos for the three males. About two kilos of fish or chicken are also included. Fruits and vegetables vary according to the seasons.

Do these bears work out to avoid overweight?

Each space is provided with tree trunks and branches for them to climb up and down. As these are territorial animals, they tend to dig a hole next to the trunk, so they can hide their favorite snacks. On the top of the trunks and above their cages, food is placed so they get to move when they want to have a bite. Treats are also hidden behind rocks, a measure that also helps them to exercise. Each bear has a pool with deep levels for their own, so they can swim and get hydrated. ITA has created a space where physical activity and feeding resemble the wilderness.



How does a proper diet relate to their skin care and behavior?

It is definitely related, as the fur is an indicator of the animal's health and nutrition. It's worth mentioning that ITA follows measures to prevent stress. First of all, the balanced diet is accompanied by medical control and

the provision of vitamin and mineral supplies. Another way to avoid stress is to feed the bears in different times of the day, following a schedule. Having the Rescue Center in the midst of the cloud forests in Machu Picchu is also of great help, as it is a natural habitat for Andean bears.