



Northwest Trek
Wildlife Park

METRO PARKS TACOMA

SECOND GRIZZLY BEAR CUB ARRIVES AT NORTHWEST TREK WILDLIFE PARK

Cub from Montana getting acquainted with keepers and settling into new home; he soon will be introduced to the orphaned cub that arrived from Alaska last week

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Aug. 7, 2018

Eatonville, Wash. – And now, there are two.



An orphaned grizzly bear cub arrived at Northwest Trek Wildlife Park from Montana on Saturday morning, joining another orphaned cub that flew in from Alaska last week.

For the first time in the wildlife park's 43-year history, Northwest Trek is home to two grizzly bear cubs.

An orphaned grizzly bear cub from Montana arrived at Northwest Trek Wildlife Park over the weekend.

They are males.

Their arrival is the culmination of a rescue that involved wildlife officials and zoologists in three states.

"The fact that we can provide these two cubs with a home in our recently reconstructed grizzly bear habitat is a wonderful outcome for a tragic story that began when their mothers were killed," said Northwest Trek Zoological Curator Marc Heinzman.

The yearling grizzly from Montana was discovered in the northwestern portion of the state on the Blackfoot Indian Reservation between Browning and Valier. His mother was legally killed after she attacked pigs on a farm, according to the state's Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks.

That cub, which now weighs around 80 pounds and stands about 20 inches tall, has been cared for since the end of June by staff at Montana Wild in Helena. They estimated he was born in the winter 2017.

The Alaska cub's mother was killed by poachers last spring. He was found malnourished and alone near Nome and nursed back to health by a team of caring and attentive keepers at Alaska Zoo in Anchorage.

“Both cubs are active, healthy and doing well,” said Northwest Trek bear keeper Angela Gibson. The Alaska cub, which weighs about 90 pounds, quickly made himself at home, rearranging the logs and other “furniture” in his den, she added.

Last week, for example, he happily played with a bear-sized wobbly toy filled with pine shavings. The odd-shaped toy helps the cub balance – a skill that will be crucial when he wants to move large logs or rocks in his habitat as he grows. It also helps him develop muscle strength and coordination, Gibson said.

And those pine shavings? Well, they help stimulate his sense of smell – and encourage natural behaviors like grooming, rubbing and nesting.

The Montana yearling is a lean, blonde-colored bear with dark arms and feet. He has the balance skills needed to climb the log structures in his den as if they were trees, Gibson said. And he quickly dug out a depression in a mulch pile so he could curl up in it to sleep.

She also described him as quiet, watchful and a bit shy. “He has the confidence to handle himself and not just react,” she added. “Mom taught him well.”

The Alaska cub is more chocolate colored with a white crescent moon collar reaching 90 percent around his neck. Although younger, he is taller and more filled out than the Montana yearling.

He’s demanding at meal time, eager to play with his enrichment toys and quick to bang around in his den with anything he can carry or throw.

There is no date set for the cubs’ public debut. They must first get comfortable in their new home, bond with their keepers and learn how to move from their dens to the outdoor exhibit and then back inside.

Gibson is hopeful that the older cub, who spent a year with his mother before she was killed, will be helpful in teaching the younger cub some natural bear behaviors.

In the wild, a cub normally would stay with its mother, learning the ways – and dangers - of the forest, for its first three years. Without this nurturing, cubs do not learn to forage for the food they need, nor to protect themselves as they grow.

Gibson and Haley Withers, another Northwest Trek carnivore keeper, are the bears’ primary caregivers. Their commitment and compassion to the species in general and to these two bears in particular is evident in everything they do. They speak to the bears in reassuring tones so as not to startle them.

Caring for cubs requires long hours of feeding, training and cleaning. And then there is the know-how and ingenuity required to devise the log structures and other items that help the bears learn how to climb and balance while strengthening their young muscles.

Northwest Trek veterinarian Dr. Allison Case has scheduled full physical examinations for them later this month.

Gibson arrives at Northwest Trek at about 6 a.m. each day and spends most of her time either feeding the cubs or working with them on training behaviors so they will be comfortable in their den and exhibit spaces. After a long day at the wildlife park, she leaves for a dinner break but returns hours later for the last feeding of the day.

Gibson says her care for the bears is both personally and professionally rewarding.

She holds bachelor's and master's degrees in biology, the latter with an emphasis in animal behavior. She serves on the Association of Zoos' & Aquariums' Bear TAG (Taxon Advisory Group) Steering Committee and is on the board of directors of The Bear Care Group, an international organization that works to advance the welfare and conservation of bears around the world.

"I know these cubs would not have survived in the wild without their mothers," she said. "It's an honor to help provide them with what they need to thrive and grow – and to know that they will inspire our guests to care about their species."

The younger cub is still receiving formula. Except for that, Gibson prepares meals consisting of the same kinds of foods for which they might forage in the wild: salmon, berries, plants and other foods. Their diet will change with the seasons, she adds, just as wild bears adjust their eating habits according to the number of calories they need at a given time and the foods that are available at particular times of the year.

The cubs are comparatively small now; they will grow into the hundreds of pounds and eventually stand a few feet tall at the shoulders. They don't have names just yet. Northwest Trek keepers will propose a slate of names for each cub, and members of the public will have the opportunity to vote for their favorites.

The wildlife park is a leader in the conservation of the species, advocating for a federal plan that would return grizzly bears to remote areas of the North Cascades. Grizzly bears are endangered in Washington state. Though once plentiful in the region, only a handful remain in the North Cascades.

For more information, go to www.nwtrek.org.

###

Northwest Trek Wildlife Park, accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums, is a 725-acre zoological park dedicated to conservation, education and recreation by displaying, interpreting and researching native Northwest wildlife and their natural habitats. The wildlife park is a facility of Metro Parks Tacoma and is located 35 miles southeast of Tacoma off State Highway 161.

Contacts

Kris Sherman, 253-226-6718 or kris.sherman@pdza.org

Whitney DalBalcon, 253-404-3637; 253-278-6343 or whitney.dalbalcon@pdza.org