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## GOBI DESERT'S EXILED BEAR

"If you don't act now, Mazaalai Bear will go extinct!" under this slogan the Fund for Protection and Study of this unique bear was set up last spring.

According to the experts from the Ministry of Environment Protection, there are only about 30 Mazaalai or Gobi Desert bears remain on the Earth.

But Dr. D. Bataar who climbed all over mountain ranges in Gobi Altai province last year, the natural habitat of this rare bears, estimates the real number is less than 20.



*Smaller than their forest relatives, Mazaalai bears survive among remote rocky mountains in the Gobi desert.*

grass hoppers or beetles.

A prediction made by Dr. J. Steinberg, an American biologist in 1998 that the specie will dissappear within 10 to 15 years may come true just in few years.

Mazaalai, as this bear is called by Mongols, lives in most remote parts of the Gobi Desert, wandering near oases and mountain ranges with water sources where they can survive through harsh and extreme desert climate.

Unlike his brethren in more forested areas, Mazaalai survives mostly by eating leaves, berries, grass roots and, if lucky, catching an occasional lizard or mice. Restricted ration of the deserts forces it not to bypass even insects like

The harsh terrain and extreme condition make Desert bear rather a small in size. A female bear caught last year was only 168 cm long, 92 cm high and weighting about 110 kg.

Female bears make winter hibernation place in rock caves or amidst deep bushes. Hibernation period lasts from November to May. In early spring or March she bear delivers 1-2 cubs. The data on Mazaalai Bear is very scarce and not much is known about it.

Back in 1996 it took almost two months for a photographer commissioned by National Geographic Society to take picture of one. Even now it is not clear whether it represents a separate specie like Chinese Panda Bear or belong to a forest type.

The conclusion of two Russian explorers, Sokolov and Orlov, made many years ago that it belongs to a separate breed, were questioned by Dr. McCarther in his 1996 study based on DNA analysis of the bear hairs.

But irrespective of scientific arguments the very existence of this unique desert bear registered in the World Red Book



*The only bear caught two years ago for scientific purposes is happy to get back to wilderness.*

is under question.

The fragile eco-system of the Gobi desert is being threatened by the advance of the human activities that intensifies the process of desertification and shrinks the traditional natural habitat of the specie. Drying lakes, the shortage of water sources diminishes the habitat for the already hard pressed animals.



*Dr.Baatar (left)*

If this trend will continue, the specie simply can not survive without a special effort. Therefore, the Fund for Protection and Study of Mazaalai Bear appeals to all people of the world, who cherish the Mother Nature, to help to save them.

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