

NORTHERN FORUM BROWN BEAR WORKING GROUP



2009 WORKSHOP
YAKUTSK & NERIUNGRI
SAKHA REPUBLIC (YAKUTIA) – RUSSIA
AUGUST 7-17, 2009



REPORT

SUMMARY

Six delegations participated in the workshop organized by Vladimir Vassiliev and the Sakha Government in Yakutia in August 2009: Alaska, Sakha, Hokkaido, Primorye, Vologda and Sweden. The goal of the workshop was to assess the situation of bear-human relations in the Republic as industrialization is proceeding at an accelerated pace in the southern areas, and to discuss with the authorities and other stakeholders what means can be used to prevent brown bears from becoming a threat to crews and populations alike.

The workshop included a day of presentations and round table discussions in Yakutsk, which allowed all the participants to find out what the latest developments were and what gaps needed to be filled. Three days were spent in the field in the Neriungri district, with presentations by local authorities, visits to industrial sites, an electric fence demonstration and a day spent with the reindeer herders. There was a very consistent exchange of information between the locals and the specialists in the working group, and cooperation on these issues will be pursued using the Neriungri district as a model for other areas.



Evenk elder Svetlana Mikhailova explains their relation to the bear

The last day in Yakutia, the participants visited the Orto-Doydu zoo south of Yakutsk, and held there their annual meeting. A work plan was adopted for the genetic study, the location of the next meeting was decided (Terney, Primorye, Russia in September 2010 for a core meeting and most probably Vologda for the 2011 workshop), new delegates were appointed and agreements on cooperation were ratified between the various participants. Cooperation with other international bear organizations, and in particular participation of Russian specialists in the IBA conference in Georgia in 2010, was also discussed by the participants.

In conclusion, the working group noted that the participation of Ivan Seryodkin from the Primorye region was a great boost to the genetic study, since he has access to many regions involved in the study and is

himself a renowned brown bear specialist. While the group will continue its focus on brown bears of the North Pacific Rim for the genetic study, some items of cooperation will start encompassing a wider geographical area, and potentially also the growing interaction between brown bears and polar bears in the Arctic.



Yengra River

DETAILED REPORT

TOWN HALL MEETINGS

1. Yakutsk

A day-long meeting at the Yakutsk Library had to be shortened because of flight delays, but the scheduled speakers were all able to make a presentation. The reports given by the regional Sakha authorities pointed to emerging concerns. The total brown bear population in Sakha is now estimated at around 15,000 bears (no count has been conducted). An increase in forest fires, possibly driven by climate change, is leading to bear migrations, including brown bears from areas further south.



Working group plenary meeting

Presentations were made by the other regions, focusing on steps taken to mitigate bear-human interaction (Alaska, Hokkaido) or on new information about brown bear populations (Vologda and Russian Far-East).

Larry Van Daele, the leader of the working group, directed a round table discussion following the presentations to find out what the main issues were in Sakha. It appears that, besides the need to conduct a bear count and train specialists to do so, the authorities in the Republic are concerned by the lack of oversight in industrial zones, leading to habituation of bears.

Numerous materials are now available in print, and Ivan Seryodkin brought the Russian version of "Safety in Bear Country", which was shown to the group. A consensus was reached to approach the producers and find out if this video could be disseminated widely in Russia on a non-profit basis.

2. Neriungri

The group flew from Yakutsk to Neriungri, located at the southern edge of the Sakha Republic, close to the Amursky Krai. This is a region undergoing major changes: while previously connected by air and by road to Yakutsk, it will soon be connected also by rail. Mega-projects to develop its mining potential are now undergoing construction and a pipeline is being built between the oil fields of Sakhalin and central Siberia (VSTO).



Gas line base station

In Neriungri (pop. 65,000), the delegates were hosted by the municipality, provided with a bus and taken on a tour of the city. It was built only 30 years ago as a development on the BAM Transsiberian railroad, and is now beginning to develop in the wake of the mega-projects. Old housing is disappearing, new construction techniques are being adopted (in particular taking into account melting permafrost), and numerous sports and recreational facilities are available to the public.

A meeting was held at city hall with the municipal authorities, wildlife managers and activists, to discuss existing problems. It appears that the district is home to about 2.5-3,000 bears, and one or two people die every year in encounters with brown bears. Pumping stations and dumps attract the bears, and some are not afraid of man. Habituated bear cubs become problem adult bears, and have to be shot. There are no professional hunters in the district, and out of 10-12 licenses given per year, only a few are being used. The authorities know that bear parts are being sold to China and Korea. As a result of extensive forest fires in the Amursky Krai in 2008, bear migration from the south is suspected, and bears have appeared in the District that are different from the local bears.

Bear at the open pit coal mine



Visits to industrial sites yielded no results regarding specific measures towards avoiding bear incursions. The group went to see an open pit coal mine not far from Neriungri, where bears have been seen on the roads and by the equipment. Management assured the delegates that there was no reason to fear for the safety of their workers, and that bears did not pose a particular threat. The same scenario repeated itself at the construction base for the VSTO pipeline: although the base has a kitchen and food was disposed of outside the kitchen, management felt confident that the safety perimeter around the base with automatic lighting upon movement detection was sufficient to guarantee their workers' safety. In both cases, the local wildlife managers concluded that the bears would be shot if they were detected, even though they had previously met with the sites' managers to discuss the fact that shooting brown bears was not a recommended approach, for safety reasons first and also for conservation reasons.

While in Neriungri, the brown bear specialists took some time to erect and display an electric fence of the model used in North America when camping in bear country. It is a small, portable device, and electricity generation can be done using batteries, but also solar panels or a wind turbine. The group gathered in a grassy area of the central square, surrounded by curious onlookers and the media, and was successful in demonstrating how to set up the fence perimeter and charge the wires, enough to discourage a curious bear. The portable fence was left with the Sakha coordinators, so they could use it and demonstrate it in other locations. Naturally, the goal is to



I. Van Daele tests the fence

demonstrate the effectiveness of the method, given the fact bears tend to probe with their nose first and shy away from electric shocks, but adequate fencing would need to be built around industrial sites.

FIELD VISITS

1. Iengra



Bearhide at the Evenk camp

From Neriungri, the delegates traveled to the small indigenous village of Iengra, inhabited by Evenk reindeer herders when they are not out with the herds. Presentations were made by the leader of the village, Mr. Yukhnovets, and one elder, Svetlana Stepanova, about their traditions and the respectful relation the Evenk maintain with brown bears. From the village, the group was taken to a traditional camp nearby on the banks of the Iengra River, where they witnessed traditional rituals to protect the herds from brown bears. When it is absolutely necessary to kill a problem bear, the Evenks demonstrate respect for the bear by displaying and decorating the hide, and practicing rituals where they blame Raven for the killing and eating of bear meat.

2. Dog training site

The participants visited a site located in the suburbs of Yakutsk, where a bear is kept in captivity next to a series of dog kennels. The dogs, predominantly Siberian huskies, are released under the supervision of a trainer, two at a time, and allowed to attack the bear and stand their ground. The Swedish participants pointed out that they use similar training in Sweden, the difference



Dog training

being that the dogs do not come in direct contact with the bear and therefore do not risk getting mauled. They offered to provide training protocols and materials to the Sakha representatives.

3. Orto-Doydu Zoo

The Zoo is a participant in another NF project “Cooperation of Northern Zoos”, and has regularly consulted with the BBWG regarding its captive bears. The group paid a visit to the Zoo, checked on the brown bears and their cages, and reviewed the public information about brown bears on display. The Zoo office hosted the second day of the annual meeting of the BBWG.

ANNUAL MEETING

The BBWG held its annual meeting on August 15-16th.

The meeting itself started with conclusions concerning the town hall meetings. The trip to Neriungri was deemed satisfactory, although no discussions were held with the industrial companies. The exchange of ideas between delegates during the workshop was considered very productive.

International Cooperation

- IUCN Asia: several members of the BBWG are also members of the North Asia Brown Bear Expert Team at the IUCN. Information about the workshop will be sent there to appraise them of our activities. Mano and Larry are co-chairs of the Group.
- IBA: the BBWG could be taking the leadership in Russia, and show the role of the Northern Forum. The members are asked to find out which Russian specialists might be attending the IBA 19th Conference in May 2010 in Tbilissi, Georgia. Ivan Seryodkin is headed to Moscow for a conference where he will see most of his colleagues next week, and will find out who is going. The BBWG could organize a presentation and 2 or 3 poster sessions. Ivan suggests two presentations, one on European Russia and one on Asian Russia. An alternative



would be a presentation on human-bear conflicts, and Ivan could talk about the relation between bears and tigers. Vladimir Vassiliev will take the lead to communicate with his Russian colleagues and find out which regions need to supply information. William Leacock will investigate the possibility of getting CCS funding to help with travel. IBA should also have some funding available.

Group photo

Materials

Ivan Seryodin would like the video “Safety in Bear Country” to be available to all members. Dick Shideler will recontact the authors to ask for distribution on a non-commercial basis into Russia.

Genetic Research

Hifumi Tsuruga summarized the present needs for the study:

- 10 to 20 samples per area for mitochondrial DNA
- Possibility of gathering microsatellite DNA (as in the Shiretoko project)
 - Regions: Sakhalin, Khabarovsk, Primorye, Kamchatka, have already been gathered. Need: Sakha, Koryak, Magadan, Chukotka and Sakha. If possible, samples from China, Korea and Mongolia would be useful. In Kamchatka, Valentsev collected tissue samples (300) from hunters, but nonetheless, there are gaps left.
 - Definition of population vs. sub-species: morphology, genetic analysis, other factors will enable to determine if we are dealing with a sub-species.
 - Tsuruga-san would prefer tissue samples, but can also use hair. Feces: difficult to use for micro-satellite analysis.



Clockwise: William Leacock, Tsutomu Mano, Hifumi Tsuruga, Ivan Seryodkin

- Training Russian specialist in Japan so the analysis could be done in Russian. There could be a possibility in Moscow. Ivan Seryodkin will investigate the possibility his lab in Vladivostok could conduct the work.
- Sample export from Russia to Japan: the two countries have signed an agreement to help each other on conservation issues, and brown bear joint research is one of the elements of the agreement. CITES Moscow requires a letter from CITES Japan confirming there are no import limits on samples, but CITES Japan deems useless to produce such a letter, since there are no limits.
- Ivan Seryodkin could use his project with WCS to include samples of blood and hair to be resent by WCS to the Northern Forum in Alaska.

Conclusions:

- Develop cooperation with Sakha and Primorye
- Tsuruga-san will send them the sampling tools
- Ivan Seryodkin will work on CITES permit to send samples to the US (via WCS).
- Regions to be approached: Ivan can do the sampling in Sakhalin, and receive samples from Chukotka and Magadan. Innokenti and Egor will try to be in touch with their colleagues to receive samples. Larry Van Daele will also seek ways to get samples from Korea and China, and we already have Mongolia thanks to Harry Reynolds.
- William Leacock and Larry Van Daele will try to find financing for the study.



Seryodkin's presentation

2010 Meeting

Next year's meeting will be a core meeting, with only one representative per region.

Ivan Seryodkin proposes to hold it in Terney, Primorye, where he can secure accommodations for a small group.

The next workshop in 2011 would be held in Vologda, or possibly in Sweden in Gronkitt.

Vologda: Olga Zuyanova needs to reach an agreement with her government to provide funding to host the meeting (accommodations provided on a cheaper basis, like local housing or tents).

Sweden: Anders Björklund would recommend selecting a time of year between seasons.

Action Plan

- Finalize genetic study
- Science exchanges in the field



Evenk carpercaillie dancer

- Sakha: to be provided with assistance for counts and other actions
- IUCN and IBA: encourage Russian delegation to Tbilissi
- Human-bear conflict management: disseminate video "Safety in Bear Country"
- Booklets and leaflets: continue production and distribution
- Legal issues: new hunting legislation in Russian, exchange texts on hunting legislations in the US, Japan, etc.
- Translation of scientific literature: no funding available until now. If translators are available, it would be useful to translate hunting legislations and bear safety literature.
- Dog training for bear hunting: Swedish-type training (the bear is not in direct contact with the dogs)
- CD-ROM to be updated for 2010

- Page to be developed on web site about human-bear conflict.
- List of participants to be distributed

Member Regions

- Any region can become a member
- Only NF regions can vote
- Sakha new coordinators: Egor Nikolaev (Vice-Director, Sakha Game Department) and Innokenti Okhlopkov (Scientific Secretary, Institute of Biologic Resources in the Cryolitic Zone, RAS)
- Primorye region coordinator: Ivan Seryodkin.
- Encourage Chukotka participation.



Fm left to right: Innokenti, Larry, Egor and Rick

Next Meeting

Terney, Primorye – September 2010
2011: either Vologda or Darlarna, Sweden.



Group photo by the Yengra River

TOTAL BUDGET 7TH WORKSHOP: \$ 54,000

National Parks – Shared Heritage Beringia Program	
Items	Amount
Airfares Anchorage-Vladivostok RT	\$4,046
Airfare Khabarovsk-Seoul	\$1,340
Airfare Vladivostok - Yakutsk	\$562
Airfare Yakutsk-Nerjungri RT	\$4,710
Hotel Seoul	\$165
Reception	\$1,072
Coffee breaks	\$535
Transportation	\$910
Conference rooms	\$291
Interpretation	\$2,600
Preparation and logistics	\$3,000
Visas	\$770
TOTAL	\$20,000

OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS

Fish & Wildlife \$ 12,000
Trust for Mutual Understanding: \$ 12,000
Sakha Government: \$ 10,000

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