



## RE: Network to map Asian bears

Dear Participant:

Thank you for agreeing to be a part of the IUCN SSC Bear Specialist Group's (BSG) effort to map populations of bears across all 33 range countries in Asia. The BSG previously created range maps for Asian bears (Asiatic black bears, Brown bears, Sloth bears and Sun bears) in 2006 and 2016, and we are due to update these maps for the 2026 Red List assessments of these species.

Our previous range maps relied mainly on expert opinion of BSG representatives of each range country. For our current effort, we are expanding the information base to anyone or any organization with *knowledge of bears in some local area and/or with presence points* that can be shared.

We will employ a new and novel method that will integrate polygon data and point data:

### [Polygon data](#)

We have developed an app where participants can draw polygons (outlines of ranges) within your area of familiarity. You will be sent a link to this app separately. Note: if it expires, simply click on "forgot password" to activate. If you do not receive it, please check your SPAM. Alternately, you can just click on the app (<https://mappingasianbears.org/app>), hit "forgot password", and it will send you a link to enter a password.

There is a detailed manual of instructions for using the app. If you lose it, or if you'd like a higher resolution copy, it is posted [here](#) (i.e., Bear Specialist Group website, under News & Resources). This cover letter is also posted there.

There are 3 important things to note about the polygon data:

**4 kinds of polygons:** The app asks to draw polygons around areas where: (1) there is definitive evidence of bear presence in past 15 years; (2) there is no definitive evidence of bear presence, but habitat is suitable [probable presence]; (3) there is no definitive evidence, but habitat or other threats make presence unlikely [probable absence]; and (4) bears are known to be absent. *Please see more precise definitions and many examples of these 4 types of polygons in the manual before drawing any polygons.*

**Metadata:** The app asks for information supporting each of the 4 types of polygons: types and extent of data; dates of latest information; etc. This is explained more fully in the manual.

**Redundancy:** It is important that multiple, independent participants draw polygons for many of the same areas, as a way of assessing how well they correspond. Instead of seeking a single "expert", our mapping technique relies on local knowledge by many people, and so redundancy is essential.

## Point data

Point data will also be crucial to this mapping effort. There will certainly be many gaps where nobody drew any polygons because nobody was familiar enough with the area. We will use the polygon data PLUS any separate point data to create a predictive computer model to fill in these gaps.

If you have point data that you can contribute, please contact Chengcheng Zhang ([ZhangC@si.edu](mailto:ZhangC@si.edu)). If you require a data sharing agreement, we can work with you on that.

## Signing up more participants (snowballing)

This effort relies on a broad network of participants who have knowledge of bear presence/absence in local areas, and/or point data. The app cannot be passed on, but if you know someone else who may be able to contribute, please contact your species coordinator (the person who invited you), or Chengcheng Zhang ([ZhangC@si.edu](mailto:ZhangC@si.edu)).

## Credit and use of data

All participants in this effort will be acknowledged on all products, and where appropriate, some participants will be invited to be coauthors of some papers. We cannot promise co-authorship to all participants.

The use of data in this effort will not preclude you from publishing the data separately. For example, the peer-reviewed journal *Ursus* now welcomes publication of presence data (even very small sample sizes in one area, especially if it represents the only known documentation of bear presence in that area). Alternatively, this information is publishable in *International Bear News*. Please feel free to contact me for more information about this ([Dgarshelis.bsg@gmail.com](mailto:Dgarshelis.bsg@gmail.com)).

Ultimately, all of the data will be used to create range maps, which will be posted on the IUCN Red List, where they will be downloadable (as jpgs and as shape files); hence, further use of the final maps will be openly available.

We will maintain both the original polygons and point data in an archive so the range maps can be easily updated in the future. This will be kept internally within the Bear Specialist Group, and will not be shared publicly.

We greatly appreciate you joining in this effort.

Most sincerely,



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