



Invitation to join network to map Asian bears and delineate populations at risk

The IUCN SSC Bear Specialist Group (BSG) is embarking on a continent-wide effort to map populations of bears across 33 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. Moreover, our new effort is aimed at delineating populations at greatest risk as well as highlighting areas where presence/absence of bears remains uncertain. We are asking for your assistance in this effort.

Our previous range maps relied mainly on expert opinion of BSG representatives of each range country. For our current effort, we hope to expand the information base beyond the ~100 BSG members in Asian countries to a large network of governmental and non-governmental partners. Our hope is that this network will include anyone or any organization with knowledge of bears in some local area and/or with presence points that can be shared.

These updated maps will use opinions about presence/absence of bears from people familiar with a local area, combined with models generated from point data (e.g., camera trapping records, sign surveys). Thus, participants will be asked to: (1) review polygons on an existing range map for their local area and provide their knowledge of presence or absence of bears; and (2) contribute point data, if available.

Each presence/absence polygon on the final map will be attributed to a specific person or organization and aptly described to a specific year and degree of certainty.

All participants in this effort will be acknowledged on all products, and where appropriate, data sharing agreements with the BSG (or Species Survival Commission) will be developed. Although we have plans to eventually publish the range maps, we will only use donated point data for creation of this product; these point data will remain in a BSG archive and not be made public or given to anyone for other uses.

Our hope is that the network of participants across Asia will enable the creation of a reliable and useful product that is transparent and easily updated, and can better guide the conservation of these species. Further, we hope that other organizations partnering with the BSG gain a better understanding of the status of bears in their local area.

We invite you to join in this effort.

Most sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'David Garshelis'.

David Garshelis
Co-chair, Bear Specialist Group