Challo and Lexi Return to Freedom for World Conservation Day

Wednesday 4 December, 2024

On World Conservation Day, International Animal Rescue (IAR) proudly celebrates an incredible moment, the release of Challo and Lexi, two Syrian Brown Bears, back into the wild. This monumental moment, made possible by IAR and their dedicated partner, the Foundation for the Preservation of Wildlife and Cultural Assets (FPWC), signifies the start of their new, free lives in the Armenian mountains.

The two bears were found separately as small cubs, alone and helpless on the Armenian hillside. Challo was trapped in a wire snare and would have died under the heat of the scorching summer sun if IAR and FPWC hadn't come to his aid. He was treated for heat stroke and his wounds were dressed at the scene of his rescue before he was rushed to the FPWC wildlife centre in Urtsadzor for further treatment and care. Lexi was discovered crying pitifully in the darkness from the branches of a tree. There was no sign of her mother and so she too was brought into the centre where both cubs underwent extensive rehabilitation, but with barely any human contact, to prepare them for their return to the wild. The bears regained their natural instincts through care, environmental enrichment, and careful observation. Their journey culminated in this epic release, where they bounded into the wilderness, sniffing, climbing, and exploring—finally at home in their natural habitat.

Alan Knight OBE, Chief Executive of International Animal Rescue, shared

"Releasing Challo and Lexi back into the wild is a powerful reminder of why conservation efforts matter. These bears, once symbols of suffering, now embody hope and resilience. Thanks to the support of our donors and partners, they are free to live as nature intended. Watching them thrive in the mountains is an emotional moment and a reminder that together, we can achieve incredible outcomes."

The release also reminds us of our greater mission. Across Armenia, dozens of Syrian Brown Bears endure unimaginable suffering, locked in tiny cages at restaurants, factories, and roadside zoos. Many of the bears display signs of severe psychological trauma from years of neglect. Since 2017, The Great Bear Rescue campaign, spearheaded by IAR and FPWC, has saved over 30 bears, providing them with compassionate care and the opportunity to return to the wild when possible.

The journey of Challo and Lexi builds on previous successes, including the groundbreaking release of orphaned cubs Bambak and Zangak in 2018. These bears thrived in their natural environment, demonstrating the efficacy of IAR's rehabilitation program.

This World Conservation Day, International Animal Rescue calls on the global community to think about conservation and to join the mission to end the suffering of Armenia's captive bears.

Join us in celebrating Challo and Lexi's incredible journey and help us rescue more bears in need. Every donation or social media share will help to raise funds to directly support our rescue operations, veterinary care, rehabilitation, and eventual release. Together, we can ensure every bear gets the chance to live freely, as nature intended. International Animal Rescue invites you to read more inspiring stories or support our bears at www.internationalanimalrescue.org.

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