Peek-A-Bear – Mum and dad wake baby bear following first hibernation.

Thursday 12 March, 2026

One year on 'The great bear rescue' family successfully hibernate in Armenia

A year ago, International Animal Rescue (IAR) took part in the rescue of three Syrian brown bears, Aram, Nairi and their young daughter Lola. Today, IAR are happy to report that the bears have successfully undergone their first-ever natural hibernation period in the sanctuary, thanks to the expert care they received following their rescue.

When our colleagues at the Foundation for the Preservation of Wildlife and Cultural Assets (FPWC) discovered Aram and Nairi confined to filthy cages in someone's backyard in Yerevan, Armenia, they had suffered years of appalling abuse. The pair were denied even basic husbandry and Nairi was regularly bred with by the owner to produce cubs which were sold on.

Little girl bear Lola was kept imprisoned with them and her mother, having been born in captivity. This winter, after months of recuperating from their rescue at FPWC's wildlife rescue centre with support from International Animal Rescue, all three of these bears have been able to undergo their first-ever proper winter rest periods – a sure sign that they have physically recovered from their ordeal and learned to trust that rescue teams will keep them safe.

Confined to filthy cages and denied even the most basic care, the bears were discovered during an investigation by the Foundation for the Preservation of Wildlife and Cultural Assets (FPWC) following a public tip-off.

Their rescue saw FPWC and International Animal Rescue coming together to secure their freedom. Described by International Animal Rescue (IAR) as their "most difficult rescue to date", it took over 12 hours. The rescue involved a court-ordered confiscation, police intervention, and transport under heavy rain and darkness.

This difficult rescue started when the team arrived at the property at 9 am, but the bear's owner refused entry despite a legal order. After a prolonged standoff, they finally gained access as night fell and worked into the night to sedate and remove the bears from their appalling conditions.

Alan Knight OBE, President of International Animal Rescue was on the ground to witness their their rescue.

"This difficult rescue started when the team arrived at the property at 9 am, but the bear's owner refused entry despite a legal order. After a prolonged standoff, they finally gained access as night fell and worked into the night to sedate and remove the bears from their appalling conditions. These bears had clearly suffered for many years and these were some of the worst conditions I have ever seen. The stench, the filth, the sheer cruelty of locking these animals up in tiny cages."

Today, thanks to veterinary care and round-the-clock specialist care at FPWC's wildlife rescue centre, just a few months after the rescue, all three bears have been able to settle into their new home. *"To see them happy and healthy, knowing they have a future now, makes everything we went through worth it. Completing their first hibernation and exhibiting these natural behaviours is an incredible sight. We are so grateful to the FPWC team and all of our donors and supporters for making this a reality."*

Donate to the bear appeal here https://www.internationalanimalrescue.org/appeal/bearfamily

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