

## IBBR GOES TO GREECE



IBBR was invited to present at the 23<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on Bear Research and Management in Thessaloniki, Greece, October 5-11, 2014. Over 200 attendees from over 40 countries came together during this week-long conference that focused on “Bears and humans in the 21st century: challenges and solutions for a peaceful coexistence.”

Sessions included information on the distribution and conservation status of bears around the world; methods for estimating and

monitoring populations; the use of genetics in the study and conservation of bears; ecology and behavior of numerous species of bears; methods of response to human/bear conflict that work towards a holistic solution; programs working to engage world-wide communities in bear conservation; and the session that IBBR presented in – “What Works: Innovative Successes in Bear Conservation, Management, and Science.”

This was an unprecedented opportunity for IBBR to directly bring information about our rehabilitation program to an international audience. Focusing on our rehabilitation program that has handled over 200 American Black bear during the last 25 years, we shared the results of our work which highlighted: 1) the successful rehabilitation of injured and orphaned bears at a near-urban facility; 2) known survival rates of released bears (over 96% of IBBR bears considered successfully released); 3) known post-release data that demonstrates that less than 2% of released IBBR bears are considered to be involved in human/bear conflict; 4) how IBBR does not take a one-size-fits-all approach to the rehabilitation of injured and orphaned black



bear; 5) our work to reduce the likelihood of orphans and injured bears through our *Be BearWise* initiative; and 6) our continuing efforts to encourage the development of ethical and science-based protocols in the regulations and management plans of wildlife agencies, the development of standards that define human/bear conflict and appropriate agency responses, and the importance of the inclusion of rehabilitators in the development of management policies as they affect bear rehabilitation.

IBBR’s program presentation was well received by conference attendees, and as a participant, we learned for example, about the research of Leonardo Berczky, coordinator at Europe's Centre for the Rehabilitation



of Orphan Bears in Romania that focused on studying the distinct personalities of individual brown bears and how understanding those personality types might help to predict later conflict situations. This is directly applicable to the work of IBBR, as we have also emphasized the role of individual bear



personality and potential future conflict behavior. Although the actual incidence of IBBR bears becoming involved in future conflicts has been found to be no different than their wild counterparts, some wildlife agencies continue to express concerns about the effects of rehabilitation and future human/bear conflict. Mr. Bereczky's research helps to validate IBBR's continued assertions that rehabilitated bears are no more likely than non-rehabilitated bears to

become "conflict" bears; that bears in rehabilitation do not need to be exposed to aversive techniques to create a "fear" of humans; that bears can be successfully rehabilitated at a facility that is near an urban area; and, that conflict behavior is more closely associated with the individual personalities of bears, and that those personality characteristics are not created during rehab at a facility like IBBR's.



In addition, we also had the opportunity to meet Dr. Liya Pokrovskaya, a zoologist from Russia, who already invited IBBR to participate in a study (currently scheduled for 2016-2017) that will specifically compare the behavior of rehabilitated orphan bear cubs post release with wild conspecifics. Current plans including the tagging of 5-10 rehabilitated cubs released from IBBR in 2016 and 2017, and tracking their subsequent movements via satellite

transmitters. We will be able to share this information with other scientists and the general public. We are very excited to be participating in this project!

Thank you to all of our supporters who helped fund our participation at this conference! Not only is it important that IBBR continue to learn information that is applicable to our work, it is essential that we directly share information about our programs with those working to protect bears and conserve their habitat around the world.



Valerie LeBoeuf