

help with the bears. After active consultations with Alertis a decision was made to take the bears to a bear sanctuary called the 'Bear Forest' and located within Ouwehands Zoo in the Netherlands. The 'Bear Forest' is a sanctuary for mistreated and abused dancing bears, circus bears and other captive bears rescued mainly from Eastern European countries. The 'Bear Forest' is a semi-natural 20,000 sq. meter enclosure with trees, sand, running water and dens for hibernation. To stimulate the bears' natural behavior, a special diet, enrichment programs and interactions with other animals like wolves play an important role.

The project "Captive Bear Rescue Initiative" was launched and financed by Alertis with the goal of transferring the three brown bears from Rustavi Zoo to the Netherlands as soon as possible. At the time the former head of the now closed Rustavi Zoo, was temporarily maintaining the bears using his own finances. In November 2006 NACRES took over with the financial support of Alertis and supplied the bears with food and proper care. At the same time Alertis started a campaign throughout the Netherlands to raise funds for transporting these bears to the Netherlands. These funds were gathered surprisingly quickly because the general Dutch public was deeply moved by the story of the bears.

During the last months of 2006 NACRES and Alertis were busy dealing with logistical and legal arrangements connected with the export of the bears to the Netherlands. Much preparation was necessary, such as; beginning the official application procedure for obtaining the CITES export permits, discussing possible routes and ways of taking the bears to the Netherlands (land and air transportation means), that would allow us to transfer bears according to the international standards of live animal transportation.

On April 29, 2007, three brown bears were transported with a char-

tered Russian cargo plane from Tbilisi to Maastricht in the Netherlands. After a few weeks of quarantine and extensive examination they were released into the 'Bear Forest' in Rhenen where they now live together with seven other former circus and dancing bears. The three Georgian bears were lucky to survive, but unfortunately their brothers and sisters in Georgia are still under great and continuous danger of extermination. ❖

Getting a Second Chance in Greece

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Traffic volume, as well as new highway construction in northwest Greece, has an increasing impact on brown bear habitat connectivity and population status.

It must have been a surreal experience for drivers on the newly constructed "Egnatia" highway in Northern Greece when, on the evening of the 21st of August, they saw a young bear walking along the road! The

animal had managed to cross the "bear-proof" highway fence, was hit by a passing car, and was found injured wandering in a wide interchange, unable to find a way out.

The incident occurred in the area of Polymylos, which is near two mountains recently re-colonized by bears. Immediately, experts from the two leading bear NGOs, CALLISTO and ARCTUROS, were notified and in a joint operation managed to tranquilize the injured animal. "Jumper", as the 2.5 year-old male bear was affectionately named, was handled by a CALLISTO veterinarian and transported to the Veterinary Station of ARCTUROS for rehabilitation.

After remaining there for a couple of days and undergoing necessary tests, the animal was released, in cooperation with all relevant state authorities, at a safe distance from the highway, in an area with suitable habitat not far from the capture site.

In order to monitor the behavior of Jumper, he was fitted with a satellite collar and is being tracked by a CALLISTO field team currently working in the area. For the first few days after his release the young bear remained sedentary but he then started moving again, covering more than 40 km in just a few days ❖.



CALLISTO veterinarian examining injured bear

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