With experience, people can tell bears apart

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Studying the social interaction of bears through the use of camera traps and visual observations requires that humans be able to tell individuals apart. A study done using volunteers to study the vulnerable Andean bear indicates that people can learn to identify individual bears, given a little practice. The research, done by San Diego Zoo conservationists with international collaborators using photos spanning many years, also indicates that young bears usually retain many of their unique markings as they grow older.

"Knowing, scientifically, that people who have been trained to identify individual bears can do so with a reasonable expectation of accuracy helps us to know that the work we are doing to learn about these bears is based on good science, not just personal opinion" said Russ Van Horn, Ph.D., a lead researcher on the study and a research scientist for the San Diego Zoo Institute for Conservation Research. "It also allows us more freedom to engage local citizen scientists in the effort to save the species around them."

Published in a recent issue of *Wildlife Biology*, the study used photos of Andean bears in many different zoos.

Bringing species back from the brink of extinction is the mission of San Diego Zoo Global. As a leader in conservation, the work of San Diego Zoo Global includes onsite wildlife conservation efforts (representing both plants and animals) at the San Diego Zoo, San Diego Zoo Safari Park, and San Diego Zoo Institute for Conservation Research, as well as international field programs on six continents. The important

conservation and science work of these entities is made possible by the San Diego Zoo Wildlife Conservancy and is supported in part by the Foundation of the Zoological Society of San Diego.

Provided by Zoological Society of San Diego

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