

# Smithsonian's National Zoo asks public to name Andean bear cub brothers

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Credit: Photo by Connor Mallon / Smithsonian's National Zoo

The Smithsonian's National Zoo, in collaboration with Univision's ¡Despierta America!, is inviting the public to name two rambunctious and charismatic 18-week-old male Andean bear cubs. Starting today, March 16, fans can [vote on the Zoo's website](#) for their favorite among names reflecting the cultural significance of Andean bears to the Quechua and Aymara, the indigenous communities of the Andes region,

the native habitat of Andean bears.

The public can vote until Sunday, March 22. The winning names will be announced live on ¡Despierta America! and at a media event Thursday, March 26, at the Andean bear exhibit. The following Saturday, March 28, the cubs will make their public debut.

"By inviting everyone to select the cubs' names, we hope to instill a connection to this charismatic yet vulnerable species," said Dennis Kelly, director of the National Zoo. "Bear conservation efforts are vital for [bears](#) in their native habitats. I'm proud of our success in the past five years, which has been a combination of cooperative animals and keeper expertise."

Andean bears are known as Ukumari or simply Ukuku in Quechua and Hukumari or Jukumari in Aymara. They are said to protect travelers, especially musicians and dancers, during their pilgrimage to Q'oylluriti (a festival held high in the Andes mountain near Cusco), oversee the festivities, and are conduits between the Apus (gods of the mountains) and the people. To the native cultures, Andean bears are known as being loving and happy, seeking harmony and balance in nature.

The name choices for "Cub 1" are:

- Larusiri (lah-roo-SEE-ree): This name in the Aymara language means "giggly."
- Mayni (MY-nee): This is an Aymara word that means "unique."
- Kuisqa (coo-SEES-kah): This word in the Aymara language means "happy."

The name choices for the "Cub 2" are:

- Tusuq (too-SOOK): This is a name in the Quechua language that

means "dancer."

- Muniri (moo-NEE-ree): This is a name in the Quechua language that means "loving."
- Wayna (WHY-nah): This is a Quechua word that means "young."

"This is the first time we've had a pair of male cubs, and already we're seeing them wrestle, pounce on and play with each other much more than our previous litters," said Karen Abbott, animal keeper. "Their interaction with one another and Mom is especially endearing; I think the public will enjoy watching them play and explore their yard."

The cubs were born to 8-year-old mother Billie Jean and 21-year-old father Cisco Nov. 10 and 11, 2014. They have spent the past four months bonding with Billie Jean in a den at the Andean Bear exhibit. Animal care staff has been closely monitoring the family via a closed-circuit cam. The birth of these cubs is significant for the population of Andean bears in human care.

Three of the five Andean bear cub litters born at North American zoos in the past 10 years were at the National Zoo. The information gathered from watching their behavior will be shared with the Association of Zoos and Aquariums for the benefit of other institutions that want to exhibit and breed this species. To follow the cubs' progress, check for news on the Zoo's [website](#) and its Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts.

Andean bears are South America's only bear species, and as their name suggests, they live in the Andes and outlying mountain ranges—from western Venezuela through the Andes in Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and ending in northwest Argentina. Also called spectacled bears, Andean bears have beige "spectacles" encircle these bears' eyes, giving each individual a unique set of markings.

Andean bears are listed as vulnerable on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List of Threatened Species, and it is estimated that there are only 20,000 left in the wild. Habitat destruction and hunting pose the greatest threats to their survival.

Zoo visitors can see 2-year-old bears Curt and Nicole, as well as Cisco, on exhibit near the lower entrance to American Trail, weather permitting.

Provided by Smithsonian

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