

# Orphaned bear cubs win hearts in Montenegro

April 4 2017, by Olivera Nikolic

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Masha and Brundo were probably orphaned when a hunter killed their mother

Two orphaned bear cubs have captured hearts in Montenegro after a farmer rescued them from starving to death in the wild.

The cubs were found last month by March Ilinka Bigovic, who lives in a village perched on the Pusti Lisac mountain, some 80 kilometres (50 miles) from the capital Podgorica, near the Bosnian border.

"I heard some screams. Persistent, day and night, for two or three days," the 61-year-old said.

Bigovic searched the area with her brother until they almost stumbled over the cubs "separated, on the brink of death, weak," she told AFP.

"We brought them home, put at a warm place near the stove and fed them milk and honey."

Montenegro's mountains are home to 50 to 100 [brown bears](#), according to ecologists, while the national hunters' association puts their number at 357.

Bigovic, who breeds goats, is used to close encounters with wild animals—a wolf recently killed a goat just near her house and she often sees bears.

The story of the two orphans has spread like wildfire in the Balkan country, with many people coming to have their photo taken holding the cubs.

But engineer and animal-lover Miljan Milickovic was worried—he realised the cubs were on the way to become irreversibly domesticated, and if nothing was done, their future could be only a zoo or a circus.



Experts warn that if the cubs spend too long with humans they will not be able to return to the wild

Milickovic persuaded Bigovic to let him take the two animals as a temporary measure until they can be moved to a specialised facility that can prepare them to return to the wild.

The cubs, now named Masha and Brundo, are living at his family property, some 20 kilometres north of Podgorica, where they live in the company of a deer, an emu, a boar and a llama.

Masha and Brundo approach people and other animals without fear, looking for a hug, food or to play.

"In a bid to save their lives humans ... made their return to the wild more difficult," said Jovana Janjusevic of the Center for Bird Protection,

which is also involved in protecting larger animals.

"After two months with humans, the cubs cannot be rehabilitated and successfully returned to the wild," she said.



Miljan Milickovic is caring for the cubs until they can move to a specialist centre

Activists are now racing against time to get the permits needed to move

the Masha and Brundo to Greece or Romania, which—unlike Montenegro—have centres that specialise in dealing with orphaned bear cubs.

Masha and Brundo would spend between a year and 18 months in a such a centre before returning to their mountains.

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