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NEWS

BY TAYLOR PERSE



OSO AND MAK
THE GRIZZLY DUO

PHOTO COURTESY WILDLIFE SAFARI

OSO HIGH

Grizzly bear at Wildlife Safari pioneers CBD treatment

Oso the grizzly bear sees his trainer Sarah Roy and wanders up to the fence of his enclosure at Wildlife Safari in Winston. His roommate, a grizzly named Mak, joins him, and together they wait patiently for Roy to deliver a treat.

A year ago, before his cannabidiol — CBD — treatment, Oso wouldn't have even made it to the fence.

"We started noticing that Oso's gait and the way he carried himself were incorrect," Roy says. She thought hibernation would help his stiffness and joint pain. "When he woke up this spring, his hips had not improved at all, and he had actually gotten worse."

Roy is the carnivore supervisor at the park and has been with Wildlife Safari for 14 years. She oversees care for the bears, lions, cheetahs and tigers.

"I was here the day Mak and Oso arrived at the park 10 years ago and have been with them ever since, so it's really easy for us to see changes," she says.

After observing Oso's worsened condition, Wildlife Safari began looking for a solution. They tried a variety of pain medication, including arthritic meds and supplements. But Oso's condition wasn't improving.

"We were worried to the point where his quality of life wasn't really where it needed to be anymore," Roy says.

Then, Roy found Treatibles — a company that designs hemp-based products for helping animals who struggle with joint pain or anxiety. "I didn't really know anything about it," Roy says. "I mean I did as much research as I could in a short amount of time." She ran it by Oso's vets, who approved CBD treatment as a final effort to save Oso.

"Oso the bear is the first time we have heard of a bear trying our product," says Julianna Carella, Treatibles CEO. Their products have been used on a range of animals from dogs and cats to horses, but using a hemp-based product for a bear is new territory.

Treatibles began in 2008 by producing cannabis products for humans. People began asking if there was a way to treat their pets with cannabis, Carella says, but the THC levels were dangerous to pets.

So the company developed a cannabinoid product that was suitable for animals. Treatibles medication is derived from the hemp plant, so it contains a non-toxic, minimal amount of THC. Treatibles do not have a psychoactive element, making it safe for pets.

After a few weeks of treatment, Oso's condition began to improve drastically.

"It's literally like we are seeing old Oso again," Roy says. "We're seeing a whole different bear then we've been seeing the past year."

Roy throws a few apples into Oso and Mak's pond, and the 13-year-old bears lumber off towards the water and begin swimming, an activity Oso could not do before treatment.

Now, he receives 225 mg of Treatibles CBD capsules a day. Oso gets his dose by covering the medication in peanut butter.

Both Roy and Carella hope this story encourages future use CBD as treatment for animals with chronic pain.

"In the case of the bear he was a fantastic example of giving medicine and seeing results," Carella says. "That can be a huge eye-opener and a game changer for people who have a strong stigma against cannabis."

Despite Oso's improved condition, Roy says she was nervous about how people would react, given the stigma behind using hemp products.

"We have not had any bad feedback about this," she says. "The community has been so excited."

Sadly, Roy knows that this is not a permanent solution for Oso's joint pain. Although he is young, there may come a time when treatment no longer helps. For now, Oso will continue to live his life surrounded by the carloads of people who drive by Wildlife Safari to see him each day. ■

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