

## **Yinda, a Strange Family Member**

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### **Spectacled Bear**

*This is spectacled bear expert Bernie Peyton's unforgettable story of Yinda, the Peruvian spectacled bear, and the Ecological Reserve of Chaparri that is Yinda's legacy.*

#### **The Beginning**

In October 1999, I received a phone call from Heinz Plenge, Peru's most respected wildlife photographer. I had just returned to California after spending several weeks with Heinz while filming bear worshipers at 5000 meters elevation in southern Peru.

"There's a bear living in the house of the Huaynate Diaz family in Oxapampa. What do we do about it?" Heinz said excitedly.

"What you mean by what do WE do about it?" I replied. "That one bear will cost us more than five Peruvian park budgets."

Heinz explained the circumstances. He had received a tip from INRENA, Peru's government agency in charge of wildlife and parks. They told him they were poised to confiscate a spectacled bear that was living as a pet with poor farmers on the jungle side of the Central Andean Range. Heinz told INRENA he knew a gringo field biologist who was "sure to help." Just to be sure, Heinz raced off to Oxapampa to check out the bear.

This was no ordinary pet bear. This was Juana Diaz's four-legged daughter! She and her husband, Oscar Huaynate, her children, and grandchildren lived in two shacks at the edge of the cloud forest. When I first visited Oxapampa in 1977 to start learning about spectacled bears, the steep hillsides surrounding the village were covered with cloud forests. Two decades later the hillsides were nearly bare. Remnant forest patches



provided cover for spectacled bears, who now ate corn and cattle, which had replaced their natural foods.

This reality was not lost on Oscar. He considered bears dangerous, and a competitor for the crops farmers could provide their family. And now he had one in his own house! “What’s worse,” Oscar said, “is she escapes and makes a mess of the neighbor’s squash, oranges ... everything she eats.” But Juana didn’t feel the same way about this, which placed Yinda in the middle of a family crisis.

“My other kids are trash,” Juana told Heinz. “My son Oscar beat one of my youngest daughters right by my side after she ran off with a man! My other daughters had already run off, and now I care for them and their kids. But this last daughter of mine, my Yinda, will turn out right.”

Yinda punctuated this last remark by grabbing one of the Huaynate Diaz dogs by the ear and lifting it up to a platform she was tethered to, making the dog yelp. The tables certainly had turned on those dogs. Last year they set upon something when the family was harvesting corn. Juana tore the dogs off to find a small bear cub. She carried the cub off in a sack. She nursed it on her breast and put it in her bed. She named it “Yinda” (perhaps a variant of “Linda” meaning “beautiful” in Spanish). When Heinz caught up with Yinda, she was approximately 45 pounds heavy and 18 months old. What Heinz didn’t know then was that Yinda was starting to come into heat two years earlier than her wild counterparts. Juana had sped up Yinda’s maturation by stuffing her last daughter with yucca, corn, beans, squash, even Coca-Cola. She was a feisty teenager, and she was becoming more rambunctious and harder to control by the day.



“She’s absolutely beautiful, Bernie,” Heinz said. “Black coat, white markings around the eyes and under her chin. And a blotch of yellow on the side of her white nose.” I was sure she looked comical, but the description of her eye rings was consistent with why the species was named “spectacled.” Every individual of the species had his own pattern of markings around the eyes, chin, and chest.

“I have no doubt she’s special,” I remarked disinterestedly to Heinz. Of course, from a conservation perspective, I knew she *was* special. This was the only species that remained of the bears that came over the land bridge from Asia to North America, before the brown and black bears arrived with their longer rostrums. Although spectacled bears live in the Andes Mountains from Venezuela to northern Argentina, the hurricane rate at which their forest habitat was being cut down alarmed conservationists. Most of the forests I had worked in at the beginning of my career were now gone. I considered the job of saving the forest as hopeless. Perhaps I could help slow deforestation down a bit and still provide farmers their needs. Little did I know how much hope Yinda would shed on this possibility.

“Juana does everything with Yinda,” Heinz explained to me. “The family has a long rope attached to Yinda’s neck to control her. When Juana cooks for everyone, Yinda is tied up nearby. She puts Yinda up a tree, rope and all, while she tends the crops. While she washes all their clothes in the river, Yinda swims. Her kids do nothing to help her!”

I could see the trap jaws shutting. Cute bear, really cute bear. Noble mother, like every mother I have met in Peru. She does everything for the



family, and only the bear reciprocates her love. Tragic. Oscar probably wasn't a bad father, just busy with the crops. He's watching their food creating more bear, who will eat even more food. Who could blame him for wanting to sell Yinda to a circus, I thought. The kids were angry about the attention their mother gives Yinda. This increases her isolation from them. It's a job for a psychiatrist, not a biologist!

"You know what is going to happen when INRENA confiscates that bear?" Heinz asked triumphantly.

"No, what?" I lied.

"They are going to put her in some cement pit."

"Oh brother!" I said, half seriously.

"They were here just recently. Ricardo Jon Llap told Juana that the bear was listed on the CITES list of endangered species, and it was against Peruvian law for her to keep it. Problem is, as you know and I know, there is not one facility here in Peru that can house confiscated wildlife," Heinz announced.

"That's for sure," I replied. For the next ten minutes we discussed the state of zoos in Peru. Though improving, the keepers still eat the wild pigs, the bears have open sores and flies, etc., etc.

I could have let the whole conversation die right there if Heinz hadn't innocently baited the trigger with Juana. After spending almost two decades working on spectacled bears with little success, I was looking for a story about bears that could appeal to the hearts of South Americans. Spectacled bears didn't need one more scientific article. They needed a spokesman to encourage them to adopt bears as part of their extended family. A spokeswoman!

I don't recall any rational conversations during the next two weeks. I bought the bear for \$700. The sale was held up another ten days because the police in Oxapampa were upset about not receiving their cut of the sale price. I also got a 45-year-old woman in the bargain, even though I was already married to one! Juana was determined to go with her furry child

wherever it went. Heinz and I thought that was a good idea because it would reduce the bear's stress during the voyage. But how were we going to take care of it?

The irony of that question wasn't lost on me when we asked INRENA if we could buy the bear. Since 1993, I had criticized a Peruvian law that allowed the government to sell endangered wildlife to captive breeding centers. The law lacked provisions for sufficient background checks on these facilities and their administration. To me it sounded like the government had found a legal way to participate in the black market.

Now I was going to be that market. Any background check would reveal I didn't know the first thing about captive husbandry. Heinz wasn't much better, but he had grand visions for Yinda that ignorance was not going to stop. He had been ready for years when Yinda popped into his shutter, and this gringo Bernie Peyton was going to help him achieve it. Peruvians are among the most "can do" people I have ever met. This adventure was certain to be reckless.

### **The Journey**

Heinz thought the best place to take Yinda was Santa Catalina de Chongoyape, a community of some 3000 people in northern Peru near the coast. Yinda could educate the community not to fear or hate the wild bears that inhabited the community's desert and dry forest.

I had no idea that Heinz wanted to house the bear in the same dry forest where we saw our first wild spectacled bear in 1977. It was a spot where Heinz started his career by photographing condors on a massive knife ridge known as Chaparri. The sheer walls were enough to elicit awe and fear in anyone who approached. Chaparri's mystical powers were enhanced by artesian springs that bubbled from its foothills, even when the rest of the landscape was dry. Whether it was the topography or the water, Chaparri was the mountain most revered by the shamans of northern Peru.



Nobody but powerful healers lived there because of the supposed powers of the mountain's spirit.

These beliefs had spared Chaparri's dry forests from being turned into wooden boxes to contain the lemons that farmers grew in the desert below. It was at one of these coastal lemon farms that Heinz planned to store Yinda temporarily until he could build a large outdoor enclosure in Chaparri. He called Gustavo del Solar, a former hunter of bears and the person who introduced lemons to Peru's coast. Gustavo had one of the few captive breeding zoos in the country, at his lemon farm in Olmos.

The same year that Heinz and I saw our first wild bear, Gustavo rediscovered the white-winged guan, a large member of the pheasant family that was believed to have gone extinct more than 100 years before. He devoted the next 20 years to raising these guans in captivity with the idea of eventually releasing them back to the dry forest. He instantly agreed to house Yinda. But how were we going to get Yinda 1000 kilometers over the Andes to Gustavo's farm?

I called Mark Rosenthal at the Lincoln Park Zoo in Chicago. His staff faxed us plans to construct an animal transport crate. In November, Juana bid her grandchildren a tearful goodbye as her ungrateful daughters realized their mom was leaving them for the first time ever, to go anywhere. Yinda had been coaxed into her crate with cooked yucca, and loaded on the back of a rental truck. A veterinarian was hired to accompany Yinda to Olmos. Also on the trip were Juana's oldest son Oscar, Heinz, and Heinz's publicist Maria Cecelia Astengo Moreno, or Ceci for short. She was as comfortable in high heels as she was covered in grease taking apart an engine. Ceci had no equal behind the wheel.

I created a film company while these preparations were underway. I hired soundman Jose Balado to be the sixth person in the truck to record the journey. Sometime down the road we would find the story in the editing room.

The journey from the foothills near the jungle, over the Andes to the desert, and then up the coast to Olmos, took two days. On the way, the truck drove past burned forests that once were strongholds of spectacled bears, and snowcapped peaks almost 6000 meters high. The pass at Ticlio, the highest point in the road, is over 5000 meters in elevation. The veterinarian kept an eye on Yinda, who could be seen through the truck's back window nervously chewing on nothing. Juana faced her unknown future, and that of her daughter, rigidly, in silence. Jose and I would discover that of the pair, the bear was far easier to film. As a spokeswoman, Juana was as endearing as a truck spring.

On the second day, Ceci veered off the Pan American highway to the beach. It was the first time in perhaps 1000 years that a spectacled bear had visited the Pacific Ocean. Yinda tucked her head behind Juana's wind-blown dress as the two approached the surf. She reached up to tug on the rope end held by her adopted mother. While Yinda might have been scared by this biggest of rivers, Juana was starting to relax. "None of my daughters has taken me anywhere," Juana confided in Heinz. "But this, what people call the daughter with four paws, has taken me far away. I am so grateful."

Later, by the soft light of evening, our tired party swung inside the gate of Gustavo's farm. The mesquite trees in Olmos were a welcome greeting after a day spent squinting at the desert devoid of greenery. The sounds of oven birds and Gustavo's guans were a welcome change from the rattling and grinding of the car.

A tired Juana led Yinda slowly toward a cement corral that would be Yinda's temporary lodging. Yinda promptly climbed the faique tree in the middle of the corral while Juana secured the tin door.

"Don't worry," Heinz explained to Juana. "Yinda will have a large space to run in, with many trees, cacti, water, and most importantly, there are also wild bears." But privately Heinz was very concerned about the monumental task ahead. He would have to use all the political capital and



contacts he knew to create a sanctuary for Yinda at the base of Chaparri's cliffs.

Yinda's escape from her temporary corral on the 7<sup>th</sup> of December, and her subsequent recapture four farms down the road, added urgency to our mission to build a more secure facility. Juana spent a melancholy Christmas with Yinda, away from her family. But Heinz told me her stress was starting to unwind, that she was beginning to relax.

On the other hand, my stress was about to begin. I studiously had avoided dealing with captive bears. I didn't understand why anyone would spend so much money on them when a fraction of those funds could protect so much natural habitat for a whole population of bears.

"Preserve the habitat and prevent most of the hunting mortality, and bear populations would take care of themselves," I argued to Heinz. "First you need good scientific data on bears and habitat."

Heinz agreed in principle, but a science-based approach was not the way he was going to make it happen. He would leave me to solve the technical aspects of the project while he massaged the political opinion of the community toward conservation. We agreed the answer lay in community-based initiatives that would provide jobs for local residents in return for their stewardship of bears and bear habitat.

We would start with the creation of a large enclosure for Yinda on the steep hillsides of Chaparri. Later we would reintroduce or encourage colonization of species that were locally extinct. The condors that Heinz photographed as a young adult no longer nested in Chaparri's cliffs. Gone also were white-winged guans and guanaco, a camel that once roamed Chaparri's foothills. Chaparri still had wild bears, but these were being killed by hunters at an alarming rate. We hoped Yinda would educate local residents that bears were not dangerous to them or to their livelihood as long as sufficient wild food existed. Heinz and I were convinced that we could make this bear the focus for conservation in the entire region.

The stakes were high. The El Niño floods of 1997-1998 created a temporary lake 80 kilometers long, and washed out all the roads and bridges in the Department of Lambayeque where Santa Catalina is located. Some residents of Santa Catalina were aware they needed to preserve their forests to prevent flooding, but how were they going to do it?

The community had other more immediate problems. The 3000 residents were divided into a dozen hamlets spread out over an area of roughly 100,000 hectares (250,000 acres). There were few roads and no telephones to keep hamlets in contact with each other. To go from one hamlet to another sometimes took a whole day on foot. Just getting people together to make decisions in their common interest was difficult.

The town also had little ability to manage its resources. The 3000 cattle that trampled the hillsides around Chaparri were owned by outsiders who paid nothing to the community for the pasture. Residents of Santa Catalina had no water rights, not even to the streams that flowed through their land. What they had—fantastic species diversity—they so far hadn't been able to make money from.

The northern coast was one of the three richest areas in Peru for unique species that lived in one local area and in no other. Scientists call these species "endemic." Of the many reasons why this is so, two stand out. The lack of water had prevented humans from colonizing all but a few places along rivers, leaving the vast majority of the land untouched by agriculture. Also, a gradient of humidity developed along Peru's coast that made each valley's microclimate slightly different than that of its neighbors'. As populations of plants and animals evolved under these different climates, they differentiated into separate species.

Approximately one-third of the vertebrates that inhabited Lambayeque were endemic. These included large species such as white-winged guans, the Sechuran fox, and the macanche, a huge boa constrictor. What excited me about making conservation viable in Santa Catalina was that we might be able to encourage neighboring communities to do likewise. There were



only about 20 communities between Santa Catalina and the Ecuadorean border, each community with few people and huge amounts of dry land. Perhaps an entire ecosystem could be preserved!

The whole concept rested on setting Yinda up to work her magic on Santa Catalina's residents. Heinz's plan was to start with just the residents in the hamlet of Tierras Blancas where Chaparri was located, and then expand from there. I had doubts it would work. These residents, like Oscar Huaynate, distrusted bears and feared them. Some of the neighboring communities to Santa Catalina might be anything but cooperative. In 1978, I was actually tied up by guerillas who terrorized a community above Chaparri. I suppose they released me because they had never caught a "CIA agent" with a rucksack full of bear excrement. No bear crap would save me on this side of the Andes. The locals gave it to their cattle to make them strong like bears.

They also drank the blood of newly slaughtered bears to give them strength. This they learned from the mestizo descendants of the Spaniards, who lassoed bears in the desert from horseback and clubbed them to death. Now, in all but a few desert areas like Chaparri, nothing remains to tell the story of bears except the scars of their claws on tall cactus.

I spent November and December researching an electric fence that would become Yinda's new home. I called Harry Reynolds, who managed the brown bear population in the interior of Alaska for the Fish and Game Department. He put me in touch with several suppliers of electric fence parts. I also contacted animal rights organizations that had used these fences to house confiscated circus bears in Eastern Europe. However, their staff wanted a hefty fee to show us how to construct them. So I flew Heinz up to the States and together we went to the suppliers to learn how to make the fence.

While I gathered fence parts in California, Heinz convinced Peru's military to bulldoze an 11-kilometer road to the base of Chaparri. The bulldozer operator threatened to quit until Heinz put some oil in his palm to go the last and most rugged kilometer. A dozen community members cleared brush and carried gasoline for that project. Yinda was already creating jobs!

In mid-December, I mailed 1200 pounds of wire and plastic insulators to Peru. Insulators are plastic gizmos used to attach wires to fence posts without conducting the 8000 volts of electrical charge we would put through them. A regulator limits the charge so it occurs for only 3 milliseconds every second, enough to give a nasty shock, but not to kill.

Complications arose. Peruvian customs agents wouldn't let Ceci take possession of the fence parts because I had put Heinz's full family name on the bill of lading, but not on the customs form. Somehow an extra hundred dollars identified these two names as belonging to the same person. Ceci sent the coils of wire and insulators on a truck bound for Chiclayo, the nearest major city to Santa Catalina. In January 2000 Heinz sent me a message that he had run out of both wire and insulators.

No way, I thought. I had sent him enough of both to enclose a soccer field! In mid- January, I bought another 600 pounds of fence supplies and flew with them to Peru. The customs officers could barely contain their glee for charging me an import duty of 20 per cent of the value of the fence parts. I acted like I had gotten a terrible drubbing. Somehow Customs had missed a large BetaCam video camera, tripod, monitor, and 12 brick-sized batteries that I smuggled in with the fence parts. Now we were really set up to record Yinda's story!

I was in for a shock when I arrived in Chaparri with the gear. The three-to-four-hour walk from Tierras Blancas to Chaparri had been reduced to a 45-minute drive. Vultures with outstretched wings decorated many of candelabra cactus that dotted the pampas. Red-backed hawks



were scooping up locusts. The windshield of Heinz's car was crusted with these grasshoppers when we swung through a new gate.

There, to my amazement, were two adobe houses in mid-construction. One was a caretaker's house with veranda and two bedrooms, and an outdoor kitchen. The caretaker Javier Vallejos, his wife Pepi, and their children were living in a tent nearby until their house could be occupied. Javier had killed several bears over the years. He was handy with everything he touched.

The other house was a slightly bigger construction, for Heinz and his family. It was situated at the edge of the largest pool created by the stream that flowed past both houses. A long stone patio had been laid out above the stream that would later be covered by a roof of mud and thatch, supported by rustic mesquite beams. Heinz was especially proud of one feature. Chaparri had the only sit-down toilets in the entire community!

The landscape around us was magical with palo santo trees. For half the year, palo santo trees looked like rubbery aortas; during the other half, the limbs were resplendent with green leaves and vines. Now, the new leaves were about to sprout. I could tell because everywhere, there was a resinous scent from plants releasing stored energy in anticipation of rains soon to come.

There were bombax trees whose green trunks were armored by thorns. And ironwood, whose leaves cause a nasty rash. Chaparri's cliffs rose vertically for 800 feet from these forested lower slopes, with no apparent transition. I had crawled along the base of Chaparri enough to know that the dark green patches seen here from a distance were fig trees. These trees and the bromeliads that studded the cliffs provided food and water for spectacled bears year-round.

Bears chew the base of bromeliad leaves after using their considerable strength to rip them apart. Like the giant panda, spectacled bears have large, flat molars. They also have muscle attachments on the lower jaw well suited for grinding tough foods like bromeliads.

“It is going to be relatively easy for us to bring bromeliads and figs to Yinda’s enclosure,” I told Heinz. He and Javier laughed, and led me up the quarter-mile trail past the houses to where they were constructing the fence. My jaw dropped. The enclosure was huge, the side of the fence I could see screaming up a cliff! As we scrambled up along its side, other mesquite posts came into view far to the right. “No wonder you ran out of wire.”

Altogether, Javier and his sons had enclosed two hectares (five acres). Within the fence, Yinda would have over a dozen wild foods to choose from, including honey in the hives that hung from the cliffs. There would be no need to bring food to her. Javier’s thumbs were split and purple from trying to nail the insulators to the tough mesquite posts. He abandoned that approach, and tied them on with wire. We had a seven-wire construction, four hot wires with three ground wires between them. Yinda would have to touch both a ground and a hot wire to close the circuit and receive a shock. A regulator, battery, and solar panel mounted two meters from the front gate provided the current. And most important of all, a prominent red switch had been installed on the post that supported the gate. When turned off, a person could open and close the gate without getting shocked, while the rest of the fence was still charged with electricity.

Yinda arrived in Chaparri later in January with Juana, her son Oscar, and two of her grandchildren who had come by bus from Oxapampa. The rains had arrived. The dry forest was turning green. Fish were running upstream to spawn. Frogs and toads appeared out of nowhere. Chaparri was a living paradise.

Yinda quickly adapted to her new home in the electrified corral. She bathed in a rock pool Javier built for her. Often she could be seen at the top of the corral high in a tree, sniffing the air. But her favorite place was an old mango tree full of ripening fruit at the bottom of the corral. It had been planted by one of the shamans who lived here 100 years ago.



Juana's routine was to take her Yinda to the corral in the morning, stay with her all day while she played and ate in the mango tree, and then return with Yinda to her tent next to Heinz's house in the evening. Every day Yinda grew stronger. By February, Juana needed Oscar to help her manage the strain on the rope that Heinz and I hoped would eventually be taken off Yinda's neck. But we were both concerned about the separation that we knew would eventually occur. Yinda seemed intensely interested in something that was just beyond the upper end of the fence. She bobbed back and forth testing the air. "I went up to check the fence," Javier told us, "and there are bear tracks all around the perimeter."

We also noticed a change in Javier. Initially he had been timid around Yinda. Now he entered the corral and wrestled with her when Juana wasn't there to scold him. The rest of the cowboys who came to look after their cattle on Chaparri's lower slopes stopped to admire Yinda and ask questions. Juana was pleased to show off her daughter. Even children from the local school trudged up the road to get a glimpse of the beast that, according to their parents, "Whistles like a man to attract cows before it hurls them to their death over a cliff."

One evening in the first week of February, the air around Chaparri became unusually still. Dark purple clouds descended on the ridges. Red-headed parrots returned to their roosts on Chaparri's cliffs a bit earlier than usual. Locusts that normally were hidden during the evening breezes appeared in the still air to feed. Juana was now in the habit of leaving Yinda in the corral overnight. All afternoon, Yinda peeled mango after mango between her paws, and ate the flesh off the stones which she then dropped on Juana and Oscar below. She was a master at coiling her rope in her teeth to avoid getting it tangled in the branches as she searched for more fruit.

Rain fell softly at first, then increased. By the time Juana and Oscar left their natural umbrella under the tree, rivulets of water were scouring

the desert. Whether it was forgetfulness or a vengeful act against his mother, Oscar did not turn the fence gate back on when they left.

### **The Escape**

The human residents of Chaparri mopped themselves up after a night of torrential rain. The road was washed out. Tent walls had collapsed. A crab raised its claws in defense on the trail to the corral, as Heinz moved swiftly past to check on Yinda. Probably out feeding in the wet desert, Heinz thought. But then he noticed something odd. A track in the damp trail, like that of a large boa. His heart sunk. Heinz raced to the corral and confirmed his worst fears. The gate was open and Yinda was nowhere to be seen, just a trail left by her rope. “It’s as if my whole world had ended,” Heinz confided in me.

Urgent word went out to the community, and the residents responded in kind. Cowboys arrived the following morning with their dogs to give chase to Yinda. The party split up. Pedro Cáceres, Valentín Sanchez, his son Edwin, and the Diaz brothers went up above the corral to the cliffs. Juan Alvarez, Eduardo, Vicente, Alejandro, and Daniel Vallejos found a spot where they could safely ford the swollen stream, and searched the foothills of Chaparri. Occasionally the men picked up her rope trail.

On the third day, a bear was spotted on the top of a triangular shaped hill, high up above the fence. Yinda had escaped into the most inaccessible part of Chaparri. Horses had to be abandoned, and the party gave chase on foot. On the fifth day, Pedro announced to Heinz: “We have to get dogs that are more accustomed to the altitude and the rough terrain above. Our dogs’ pads are bleeding. Javier has left to get them from the sierra.”

“Yinda, come back Yinda. Come back little daughter,” echoed across the valley as Juana dragged dried fish on the end of a string through the brush, hoping the scent would attract her daughter’s attention. Her only



source of love was gone. She had been crying; she was determined to get Yinda back.

The situation looked bleak. Pedro and Valentine rode up to meet Heinz, who was repairing the corral should Yinda appear. Their horses' flanks were wet with sweat. Pedro took off his wide-brimmed straw hat and wiped his face with his yellow T-shirt. "Not so good, Mr. Heinz," he said. "We looked for the bear and we didn't find it anywhere. We went all over on horseback, then on foot. Even in the most inaccessible places."

"Well, it's already more than ten days we've been looking for her, right?" Heinz asked.

"More than ten days," he said.

"You've done well," Heinz told him. "We are all grateful for the effort you have given us."

"Thank you Mr. Heinz. We have to get back to our crop fields. But we are ready to help when you need us." Pedro raised his hat in salute and turned his horse.

Heinz watched him go, thinking the world may not be so near the end. A dozen men had given him days of work without once asking for any pay. He left the corral gate open just in case Yinda might come back to feed in the mango tree. Just then, he saw Valentine turn his horse and come back. "That's a bit odd," he thought.

"Señor."

"What's up, Valentine?"

"I met a man. I don't know if you believe in such things, but he took some medicine..."

"A shaman?" Heinz asked.

"Yes. He doesn't come from here. He comes from the jungle. He took some ayahuaska and saw Yinda in a dream. Perhaps he can help."

"Thank you, Valentine," Heinz said. "Why don't you ask him to come here and we'll see what he can do."

My first reaction when Heinz told me about Regulo Mejia and his dream was, “Here we go again.” But why not? Everyone felt hopeless by now, and we didn’t have any options. Besides, Heinz believed in the power of the shaman. While he was away on a trip, a shaman told him his car at that very moment was being stolen in front of his house. It was true!

Stories of shamans abound in Chaparri. Ernil Bernal, a man Heinz knew, had a recurrent dream of a woman dressed in black holding two globes in her outstretched hands that cast blinding light. The woman descends a pyramid in one of these dreams. Ernil consulted a shaman who told him to pay close attention to the exact location of his dream. On December 21, 1986 Ernil drank three glasses of San Pedro cactus brew instead of eating his lunch. Later that day, while walking near Sipán, he saw the same woman from his dream descending a large pyramid. Then she flew over his head and alighted on a smaller pyramid nearby. The moon was on the left side, and the sun was behind on the right. The two globes!

A few weeks later, on January 17<sup>th</sup>, Ernil and his brother Chalo dug seven meters down in the smaller pyramid mound and found 25 sacks full of Moche artifacts, many of them gold. When the police learned about Ernil’s discovery, they arranged for his murder and stole the gold. These Moche artifacts were considered the archeological find of the century. Heinz took the photographs for *National Geographic* magazine. Stories like these abound around Chaparri.

In my experience, shamans can be everything from charlatans seeking power to very skilled healers. Generally they absorbed the pain in a community and gave people hope. We needed that, so I cabled some funds to Heinz for Regulo to work his magic.

Regulo arrived three days later. He looked as if he had stepped off a cod trawler in Newfoundland, not from a canoe in the jungle. The drugs and alcohol he had consumed on the job had not been kind to his angular features. But he told Heinz and Javier with conviction that they would



find “the little animal.” He led them above the corral to the place he had seen in his dream. He stopped at the base of a ledge, a place he had never been before.

“See, I told you my powers would work. Nobody believed me, but here they are,” he said, pointing to the drag mark of Yinda’s rope. “And it looks like she is not alone.”

There were several bear prints on top of the drag mark. “Incredible,” Heinz said, shaking his head. “She’s been here all along and we never suspected it.”

“I’ll tell you what I’m going to do,” Regulo responded. “I’m going to gather some herbs that grow right here in Chaparri, and we’ll drink them. Then you can see Yinda, too.”

“Tonight?” Heinz asked.

“Yes, in three to four hours. I’ll prepare the herbs.”

When Regulo was gone, Heinz told Javier that he wished the rope could be taken off Yinda’s neck. “It’s like an umbilical cord attached to Juana.”

Regulo returned at dusk carrying what looked like a large cucumber. It was a San Pedro cactus. The name “St. Peter” should warn anyone about its potent alkaloids. One or two slices of the stuff boiled up is enough to make anyone travel to where Yinda was. What scared me was seeing the huge bites taken out of the sides of San Pedro cactus up on cliffs. I had little fear of bears, but I was somewhat concerned about meeting a bear drugged on San Pedro up on a cliff edge.

“Are you prepared?” Regulo asked Javier. “That’s your house. Don’t leave to go to another field.”

“I’m ready,” Javier responded. “I am anointed, and won’t go to anyone else’s house.”

The men had gathered around a roaring fire, the sparks flying from the crackling mesquite logs. Regulo had boiled up a brew of San Pedro near the corral. He was feeding the men this juice using a sea shell as a ladle.

Sometime past midnight, the men walked the remaining distance to Yinda's corral. There in the moonlight, Yinda was clearly visible to them, making her way from the mango tree toward the upper leg of the fence.

"Quick, get the mother!" Heinz said to Javier.

A reluctant Juana arrived later with Javier. She was furious to be included in such chicanery, and didn't have any faith in Regulo's magic. But the next morning when she was shown the fresh tracks, she redoubled her efforts with her dragged fish.

### **A Community Discovers its Future**

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of February, Juana walked up the smoothed boulders of the ravine past the fence. It had been three weeks since Yinda's escape, and she wasn't expecting much. Yinda suddenly dashed in front of her.

"Yinda! Yinda. Come to mamacita!" she yelled excitedly.

Yinda loped up the ravine. Then she turned and ran back, and the two embraced. Juana grabbed what was left of the rope around Yinda's neck. When she got back to the corral, there was a small celebration. Regulo and Javier noticed Yinda had been beaten up on her back and neck.

"The boys got her pretty good." Regulo joked to Juana.

"What do you know, you drunk! Leave my daughter alone!" snapped Juana, as she hauled her prize back to her tent.

"No, no, don't make jokes," Heinz said. "Juana's pretty upset with all that has happened. And besides, I just got word that her sons in Oxapampa are spreading rumors that their mother has found another man, that one of her daughters has just run away with a truck driver... Things are not so good. But great work, Regulo! And I think we ought to have a celebration to thank all the people who have helped."

March came, and with it the sprouts of green leaves. On the morning of the celebration feast, Javier came running down the trail from the corral. He was holding an anteater by the tail that was curling up to swat him with its massive claws.



Juana spent the morning swatting Yinda for the grief she had put her through. Cowboys arrived with their families. Pepi's kitchen resounded with laughter, and the chopping sounds of knives slicing hot peppers. A group of women pawed through rice to remove stones. Soon, cubes of meat from a pig and several goats sizzled in large cauldrons.

Heinz gathered the throng in a wide circle for a moment of silence to thank the mountain spirits, and to honor those who have passed away. He then thanked Regulo and the cowboys for their services, saying to them: "Imagine what is happening just with this animal. Imagine the future, when there are more bears, when there are more deer, when there are white-winged guans, when there are more peccaries, when there are condors and guanacos, and all of that. You'll see, there will be more jobs for everyone... and people from other parts of Peru and the world will come to visit us. That's why I want to thank you, and may you now enjoy our party!"

Heinz walked off to the thunderous applause of 70 people of the community, while I filmed the event with soundman Jose Balado and cameraman Cesar Perez. People said they had come to pay their respects to Chaparri's spirit, but what they really wanted was to see Yinda, the object of all this fuss.

Juana tied her daughter up to a tree at the edge of the festivities. She was unusually standoffish toward the interest of the cowboys, who wanted to engage Yinda's attention. In a quiet moment, Juana untied Yinda's rope from the tree, and they slipped off down the main road. I heard a horse whinny and looked up to see Juana take a side path that led to the corral. I alerted the film crew and we followed.

There was no dawdling to let Yinda sniff or play along the trail. Juana yanked her daughter inside the corral and sat down. To our astonishment, she untied the rope from around Yinda's neck and said: "I am leaving you, Yindita, but I won't forget you, because you were like a daughter to me, the last daughter that I love. Have a great life. Do that for all of us. I

want to see you happy the day I return. The rest is up to God, my pretty little girl. Are you listening to everything I am telling you? Your brothers would say, ‘Why are you crying, Mama? It’s just a wild animal.’ But I haven’t been able to forget you, my child. So many places yet to see because of you, my child, because of you. I am proud to have served you, my child. Don’t forget me.”

Juana let go of Yinda’s paw for the last time and turned. Yinda bounded up a trail inside the fence, then turned around to watch her human mother slowly walk down the slope, dragging the rope behind her, having done the hardest thing she could have done.

Yinda escaped once more on the last day of March, and was again recaptured. Then I got word from Heinz that a circus had arrived in the nearby town of Mocupe. “And they have two bears!”

“What, you don’t mean?! Heinz, we have no money to take care of Yinda, let alone two more bears!”

I might as well have been talking to a stone. Heinz not only wanted these two bears, he wanted lots of them: to breed them in captivity, and repopulate the entire region with bears. I thought the repopulation was warranted in extreme cases where numbers were low, but not in Peru, not yet. However, this wasn’t about science-based management. This was propaganda. Both Heinz and INRENA could send the message that they were really doing something for bears. The message for the residents of Santa Catalina was also powerful, as I was soon to regret financially.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April 2000, two heavy crates were hand-carried nearly a kilometer to what now had become known as the Chaparri Bear Sanctuary. Inside the crates were not the two circus bears, but two other captive bears that Heinz earlier had taken me to see at a rice factory in Lima. At the factory, the bears were a dreadful sight. The old male of the pair had a bloated stomach, long claws that curled around and entered his pads, and mangy fur covered in flies. He hadn’t even raised his head when his bear caretaker at the factory poured a fresh batch of carrots into the cement pit.



A younger female responded by moving stiffly towards us. She had spent almost all of those eight years in this tiny hole with her older cellmate. And now the pair had come to Chaparri.

Dr. Lydia Kolter had given us instructions about how to introduce the bears to an electrified corral, but despite this the female panicked. She ran through various parts of the fence before she died of a heart attack. Domingo, the old male, got shocked a few times and then settled down.

Yinda, who watched from her separate enclosure as the new bears arrived, bolted through the fence. She went over to an adjacent ravine where workers were finishing a large enclosure made from fishing nets. The nets were stretched across the ravine, where several fig trees grew. When finished, the enclosures would allow Gustavo's captive guans to become adapted to their wild habitat before they would be released. Yinda proceeded to eat all the workers' food, and then spent a week above the corral before wandering off. We were all depressed by what had happened—one dead bear, one escaped. Silently I was elated for Yinda, though concerned that she would be shot in a nearby cornfield. The corn was ripe now and she had been raised on it!

Heinz came up with a brilliant plan to protect her. "We'll start a soccer tournament," he announced. "Men, women, and children, from every hamlet. The rules will be simple. If a player kills a bear or allows a bear to be killed in their hamlet, that team will be disqualified."

Within months, 50 teams were playing in T-shirts with the words "El oso es agua" printed on the back ("The bear is water"). This reinforced the relationship between saving the forest, and preventing spring floods and dry streambeds. The tournament had the added benefit of getting people from distant parts of the community together every Sunday.

Within months, the military and other hunters were being thrown out of community lands by players responding to the no-kill soccer rules. For now, Yinda and her kind would be safer. But their future safety depended on creating jobs, and fast. This wasn't going to be easy. And then, the

workers hired to fix the fence snuck past Javier when Heinz was away, and stole the solar panel, battery, and regulator. I responded by telling Heinz, “No more bears! And how come Domingo didn’t escape?”

“Oh, he’s so happy,” Heinz replied. “He hasn’t even tried to escape. You wouldn’t believe the difference in him. His coat is starting to come back. He looks great. He now walks around.”

Barely a week later, on the third of June, I get a call from Heinz. “Guess what?” he says.

“What?” I said stupidly.

“We got two more bears!”

“What!! We don’t even have electricity in the corral!”

“Yes, two more bears. Remember that circus I told you about in Mocupe? Well, the townspeople went over and took the bears away, and gave them to us. The bears are in Javier’s house. His whole family is taking care of them.”

By now, the community was so charged up by newspaper reports of their actions rescuing bears that no captive bear owner was safe. Bears came from everywhere. A cub Heinz named Cha Cha crawled out of the busted crate from an overturned circus truck near Tierras Blancas. Tongo came from Luya, 250 kilometers away. Rosita came from the Lima Zoo, but previously was part of a Chilean circus. Cholita was found in someone’s house 60 kilometers away. However, the most amazing story belonged to Milagros (Miracles). This tiny cub was picked up by a rescue team investigating a plane crash on Mt. Coloque in the Chachapoyas region, a day’s drive from Chaparri. Her mother was presumed killed in the fireball, but the cub miraculously survived.

Chaparri’s reputation had spread widely. The corral was loaded with bears. Male bears were fighting each other for the attention of females. We had, we realized, moved the circus *inside* the corral. I now rued the day I had agreed to buy Yinda, having by now spent, as I predicted, those several national park budgets, many times over.



Heinz was in much worse shape. His eyesight was failing, leaving him no option to go back to his photography. A farm he owned in the jungle, land that could support his family, was overrun by thousands of colonizers. These in turn had bought his property illegally from a few dozen Sendero Luminosa guerillas posing as owners. When he tried to remove them, someone threw a rock and broke his skull.

As was our custom, Heinz and I would meet up in Chaparri and debate about what to do. One Sunday, during a return trip from Chaparri, Regulo leaned into the passenger window of Heinz's car, where I was sitting. A fog of alcohol accompanied his words. "Gringo, Chaparri will survive. Don't despair! It will work."

And work it did. The residents of Santa Catalina gathered and decided to designate almost all of their land to protect Yinda and the forest they both depended on for survival. The Peruvian government responded in kind by creating a new park category for communities, and by giving Santa Catalina rights to their own water. The day after Christmas in 2001, the Ecological Reserve of Chaparri was formally declared, with 34,412 hectares (86,000 acres).

That same year, Gustavo released eight pairs of guans to the forest from the large netted enclosure. Over 1000 tourists arrived to celebrate these achievements and see the captive bears. Many of these visitors were schoolchildren.

Most of the cattle owned by outsiders were removed from Chaparri's slopes. The forest there started to recover. I released the movie *Hands and Claws*, which told this story, a success story that none of us could have imagined. The rains arrived and people settled into the rhythm of preparing for another year of planting. Valentine continued to look after his cattle on Chaparri's slopes. During the spring, after the park was created, he heard a rustling, looked down, and recognized Yinda from the yellow blotch on her nose. She ambled along by the side of his horse for several minutes, pushing her cub in front of her.

## **More about Spectacled Bears from Bear Trust International**

*Bear Trust is solely responsible for the information in this section.  
Opinions about this information may vary.*

### **Spectacled Bear - *Tremarctos Ornatus***

**Other Names:** Short-faced bear, Andean bear, Ucumari

#### **Appearance:**

Spectacled bears are small and dark, ranging in color from black to brown; some spectacled bears have a reddish tinge. They have distinctive circular or semicircular creamy white markings (spectacles) on the face around the eyes.

#### **Size:**

Male spectacled bears are much larger than female spectacled bears, giving local farmers the impression that they live with more than one species of bear. Male bears weigh from 120 to 340 pounds (54 to 154 kg); females weigh 60 to 180 pounds (27 to 82 kg). At birth, cubs weigh from 10 to 11 ounces (284 to 312 grams). Longevity can be 25 years or longer.

#### **Reproduction:**

Females reach sexual maturity between four and seven years of age. Spectacled bears have a variable mating season, and litters range in size from one to three. Most cubs are born from November to February.

#### **Social Life:**

Little is known of the social organization in the wild.

#### **Food:**

The preferred diet is leaves, bases and hearts of plants of the Bromeliaceae family, and the fruits of other plant groups. Spectacled bears will also predate on a wide variety of foods, including livestock, fish, and rodents.

**Habitat:**

Spectacled bears are highly adaptable, and inhabit a wide range of habitats including rainforest, cloud forest, dry forest, steppe lands, and coastal scrub desert. They live in a range of altitudes from 600 to 13,800 feet (182 to 4,206 meters), preferring cloud forests between 4,500 and 8,800 feet (1,372 to 2,682 meters), and high elevation grasslands at the upper edge of the forest. They are found mainly in or near forested mountains from Venezuela and Columbia south through Ecuador, Peru, and into Bolivia.

**Wild Population:**

Estimated at 18,000 and decreasing due to loss of habitat.

**FYI:**

Spectacled bears often construct tree nests, which they use as sleeping and feeding platforms.

The spectacled bear is the second largest mammal and the largest carnivore in South America. It is the only bear found in South America.

In captivity, females and cubs vocalize using two and five types of calls respectively.

There is no evidence that spectacled bears hibernate.