# An Interview with the bear keeper Veeru

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By Jordan Schaul

Desh Raj Singh, known to most of us as Veeru is one of our sloth bear keepers. He has worked with Wildlife SOS for 8 years (most of his adult life). Veeru is twenty-eight years old and comes to Agra all the way from Thinsuaa village, Sagar district, in the state of Madhya Pradesh. Although Veeru left school in the tenth grade he can read and write in Hindi. He can also read letters in English, but can't pronounce English words very easily. He left school in the tenth grade in order to earn a living.

He first learned about Wildlife SOS when some boys from his village came here to Agra to seek employment. He too, came to Agra after he left school but found a job working at the Soor Sarovar Bird Sanctuary, which surrounds the Agra Bear Rescue Center. His hard work around the sanctuary paid off and a ranger hired him to tend to miscellaneous tasks from watering plants to cooking for staff. In total, Veeru worked for the Uttar Pradesh Forest Department for two and a half years.

While at the Sanctuary Veeru met the veterinary staff at ABRF and inquired if there was any work he could do for WSOS . Initially, he was sent to the Sloth Bear Rescue centre at Bhopal to work in the kitchen. His stint as a cook lasted for two and a half years before he was transferred back up to Agra. Veeru said that he was asked to cook for a few days before he was called in to work in bear enclosure 11. This was an exciting day for him. It was in enclosure 11 where he met Abha, a female sloth bear. He was so bonded to her, he said, that he could have slept next to her. Thay had mutual trust in each other and Veeru truly feels she loved him.

Veeru now works in enclosures 1 and 2. His favorite bears are Julie from enclosure 2 and a male named Ganesha from enclosure 1. He loves them he says because they are very "very straight forward and they are gentle and playful with all the other bears and the keepers." He added that Ganesha is blind in both eyes but still full of fun and quite active.

Veeru has been married to his wife for 4 years. They live in Runakta, a village 5km from the Soor Sarovar Bird Sanctuary. They don't have children, but Veeru treats his bears like children. He said, "My father was a farmer and we used to have lot of cows. I used to take care of them. Since then I wanted to work with animals. Working as a keeper is a dream comes true for me. I hope to continue working with animals and preferably as a keepe r."

We thank Veeru for taking time out of his busy day to share his story and we thank him for his dedication to the bears he takes care of at ABRF .