



Rescuing the Spectacled Bear

Stephen Fry

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Both wildly funny and moving -- a journal of Stephen Fry's bid to rescue Peru's endangered spectacled bears.

Spectacled Bear: The spectacled bear is small and dark, ranging in colour from black to brown, and a few have a reddish tinge. It has distinctive circular or semicircular creamy white markings on the face around the eyes, reminiscent of spectacles.

Stephen Fry: Large, unwieldy and with a distinctive bent nose and characteristic rumbling tones. Wide-buttocked from hours of sitting at writing desks and on barstools.

It has been a personal mission of Stephen Fry's to draw the world's attention to this endangered species. A BBC television programme of Fry's Peru trip was broadcast on New Year's Day 2002, and a follow-up programme was made when he went back to Peru and helped to rescue a mate for the first young bear. This is his diary of the experience. It is packed with beautiful colour pictures of Stephen, bears and Peru and it is, of course, wildly funny. Stephen Fry is set to become the Diane Fossey of the bear world.

All author proceeds will go to "Bear Rescue."

Rescuing the Spectacled Bear Details


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From Reader Review Rescuing the Spectacled Bear for online ebook

Trish says

Heartbreaking and heartwarming. That's the best way to describe this book and the foundation Stephen Fry, together with others, has started.

Most of you, if any, might have heard of this bear (perhaps even without knowing the species' name) through some headlines not too long ago when an "alien-like creature" had been found in some deforested area of the Peruvian Amazonia. After some examination it was found that it was indeed not E.T. but a bear that had been starving and caught several parasites which caused the poor thing to lose all its fur. It became a symbol for what happens when you force animals out of their habitat for money and the already big campaign against lumbering in the Amazonian jungle got some more drive.

That is the kind of bear we're talking about here. The above mentioned incident happened after the events of this book.

I dwell on this history of Fujimori because it seems to me in many ways to present a condensed history of Peru that is closer to the destiny of Spectacled Bears than you might think. From disaster to promise back to disaster again, by way of hope, violence, corruption and incompetence.

As usual, Stephen Fry has done a fantastic job of not only telling us of the titular Spectacled Bears but of the country they live in - its history as well as economy, which all tie in to the fate of these wonderful, shy, and elusive creatures.

There is more love in a sterile syringe than all the herbal teas in China.

(This about the treatment for the two female bears they rescued and how moved Fry was to see everything modern medicine has to offer as a way of helping them, which made him think of some friends at home who swear on homeopathy - which Fry himself, bless him, apparently likes about as much as I do.)

A little bit of background perhaps:

In 2001 the BBC made a documentary called *Paddington Bear: The Early Years* (sadly, there seems no way I can watch this, it seems to have been on TV exclusively *sniffles*), detailing what kind of bear the beloved children's book character was, where those bears come from (yes, there are bears in South America!), what their habitats look like, what their situation is. One bear, Yogi, was rescued from a cruel fate and brought to a better enclosure.

This moved Stephen Fry so much that he and some other people (working WITH the BBC but not FOR the BBC this time) set out to start the afore-mentioned foundation and rescue even more bears (also by buying land where they could live) only a few months later.

This book, then, chronicles the rescue of two female bears that had been held in a café (I'm not kidding, that owner should be tortured to death), the relocation of two males from a "zoo", as well as the first date of Paula (another rescued female) and Yogi.

Sadly, Fry didn't get to spend too much time with the animals so we mostly read about the journey itself: the political situation, the infuriating corruption on all levels of society, the way a number of normal people help because conserving their country's fauna and flora is important to them no matter how little they have themselves, diarrhoea (oh yeah), the stark difference between Peru and Chile (I had no idea), some historical sites, but also the impressive and diverse nature that can be found in Peru.

You have mountains that are second in height only to the Himalayas, you have beaches, you have incredibly

hot/humid and loud jungles, you have the famous Nasca lines in the driest desert on the planet, you have lakes, glens and valleys that remind one of the Scottish highlands (high and cold/dry places), you have the famous Machu Pichu, you have 10% of the world's bird population in the Peruvian part of Amazonia alone!

Bears, being high up in the food chain and the largest mammal in the country, are what is known as an Index Species. The fate and health of the bear is a kind of barometer of the well-being and destiny of the entire ecosystem they inhabit.

And I'm sorry to say but in that case it looks very bleak indeed. I understand that this is not a first world country and that most things are run differently (no judgement), but what is described here alone is so incredibly unimaginable and it can only be worse on a bigger scale.

It's a good thing then that Stephen Fry has used his trademark humour in this book or else I might have beaten someone to death with it. The dry wit, his spot-on observations, his clumsiness ... it's all so endearing.

I like that Fry tried to stay optimistic and that he's never patronizing the country or people in it, but he does take a critical look at all kinds of aspects and doesn't shy away from naming the problems.

The epilogue was very rewarding and moving and I will check out that website to see if the foundation still exists and, possibly, to see how Paula and Yogi are doing (they put up cameras).

I hope the species can make it.

Gry says

This book, as a travelogue of a trip through Peru, is quite good. Stephen Fry is witty, funny, and often insightful about the country he is visiting. The text, done in journal form, is easy to read, and it is accompanied by a generous number of absolutely breathtaking photographs. Fry takes readers through Lima and Cuzco, to the Nazca Lines and into the Amazon Rainforest, and what a journey it is! While I found all of this fascinating--Peru is on my bucket list; I would love to travel there someday--my one complaint would have to be that this book left me very thirsty for more. I wished Fry would have been able to tell us more about the spectacled bears. I had bought the book mostly because I wanted to know more about Paddington Bear's species, but I found that this short journal did not spend enough time talking about the bears to satisfy my craving for knowledge about them. In fact, even on the subjects of the Nazca lines and the Amazon Rainforest and the other sites Fry and the crew visited, Fry seemed to offer teasers--just enough information to get me really interested, but leaving me wanting to know more, more, more! This book is certainly worth reading, but now that I've read it, I'll be on the lookout for more books about Peru.

Margaret says

A charming little book written by Stephen Fry to tie in with the documentary he did on the Spectacled Bears of Peru.

Lively, interesting and engaging, the book was, alas, far too short.

A delightful way, however, to spend a quiet evening.

Daphne says

Finally read my first Stephen Fry book. Very impressed by it, and it was a fun quick read.

He has that British wit that is so easy to become enamored with.

trishtrash says

I could probably read anything written by Stephen Fry; he's a very self-aware writer, in the sense that you know he knows he's writing for an audience, rather than writing for the sake of the story or chronicling, but as he's a witty, engaging entertainer, that's not necessarily a flaw.

Rescuing the Spectacled Bear is one of his shallower offerings; it touches on the history and ecology of Peru, and the filmed events of the BBC's series, but as travelogues/celebrity diaries go, there is more flash than substance to this book... aside from ranting about the corruption, luxuriating in hotel suites or running to the loo, a basic breakdown of the days events is all you get; the glossy photos of Spectacled bears rarely have anything to do with the text (except the adorable last set) and even the landscape photography is often used as a background for a splashy display of some enthusiastic quote-from-the-text. I understand that this book was published to raise money and awareness for charity, and aimed at people who didn't necessarily want an in-depth evaluation of the species and its habitat, but honestly, I was expecting to read a lot more about spectacled bears and lot less about Fry's addiction to gadgets.

There are some lovely passages, that said. There's a reason why I claim I could probably read anything by the author. When he's on form, he's bloody brilliant. He also enjoys garnered facts, and can be steadfastly relied upon to share them, so the reader is bound to pick up something interesting. Personally, I was shocked at the story of Yungay's tragedy, as shocked that I'd never even heard of it, as much as by the events themselves. Three minutes – ninety seconds - for a glacier landslide to wipe out a town of *eighty thousand* people. Okay, I wasn't born yet, but in the wake of numerous global catastrophes, why isn't this cited more? Or have I just been oblivious? Huh, shut up.

Finally, *Rescuing the Spectacled Bear* was written for a good cause. So I'm glad I've added it to my collection of things-by-Fry, but I won't be desperately waiting for 'real' non-fiction by the author that isn't strictly Stephen-centric.

Todd Martin says

"Rescuing the Spectacled Bear" barely (ooh, a bear pun) qualifies as a blog entry let alone a book, but Fry is occasionally funny (assuming you are amused by gastric distress) and includes a few light facts about Peru and spectacled bears. Approach the book with low expectations and you won't be disappointed.

Jessica says

This was a quick read, but was heartfelt and an honest account of Fry's time working to save various Spectacled Bears. The book is a diary for his time there for a program about the Spectacled Bears. Due to

circumstances (and corruption) outside of his control they are unable to see bears in the wild, only rescue captives, but his does a great job conveying the work that is needed to continuing saving the bears while delivering a humorous and human account of his time in Peru and Chile.

Kirsty says

I purchased *Rescuing the Spectacled Bear* because I didn't like to think there was a Stephen Fry book out there which I hadn't devoured. As ever, his writing is witty and quite amusing in places, but unfortunately, the book has been quite poorly edited (no fault of the author's, of course, but it does render some of the sentences a little jarring and confusing). It is a lovely idea, to chronicle such an important programme in the way in which Fry has, and the accompanying photographs were nicely formatted alongside the text. More of a gift book than a literary read, *Rescuing the Spectacled Bear* is a little briefer than other Fry tomes, but he highlights such important issues that it is a must read if you care at all about animal conservation.

Sans says

I couldn't finish listening. Hearing how horrible the conditions were for the animals in general and the bears in particular was breaking my heart. I started crying at work (was listening on my iPod while doing database work) and had to turn it off. As amazing and wonderful I'm sure they story eventually gets, I can't handle the misery of their first meet with the bears they were rescuing.

Kahn says

Entertaining and informative in equal measure, Peru and the plight of this most secretive of bears are brought to life in a way only possible by sticking Stephen Fry halfway up a mountain.

And if My Fry's colourful prose isn't enough for you, then there are some breathtaking pictures of one of the most varied and vivid landscapes in South America.

As Mr Fry says, buy this book and save a bear.

M Pereira says

This is a cute little book, Fry addresses the lifestyle of the bears, as well as the environment of Peru. I was deceived by the cuteness of parts in the book such as when Fry is encouraged to do this interview by a toy Paddington in a mail package with the note 'will you take me home?', or the comedy at the beginning. This narrative involves bowel movements, government corruption, and a charitable appeal at the end of the book. All in all, this is an interesting piece. I really quite like Mr. Fry's writing.

Sophie says

Listened to this years ago and it struck me as poor, slow moving and not very interesting especially since it's by Stephen Fry. There is a description near the end of the rainforest which is really good but apart from that I found it a bit boring.

Trevor says

This was a nice wee book. The thing I like most about Fry's writing is that it is disarmingly honest. He does not hold back any details about what happens to him and is remarkably up-front about things many of us would, in a like situation, probably prefer not to talk about.

He is, of course, often very funny, although less in this book than I had expected.

This story – the story behind his making of a documentary about Peruvian Spectacled Bears – was a fascinating little slice of life. I learned a lot about Peru, bears, and other little bits and bobs along the way that amused or outraged me. I would very much like to see the documentaries now referred to in the book. I tried to find the website referred to in the book too – but that seems to have closed down.

His understanding of Chilean politics is a bit iffy – but he admits this himself. Despite the fact he is known in Britain as the celebrity most likely to know everything about everything, I always find this puts an unreasonable amount of pressure upon him. All the same, as the man with the questions on QI there is hardly anything he is not to be forgiven.

I'm becoming increasingly fond of well-written biographies and Fry does write a good biography – I've moved on to *Moab is My Washpot* now, as recommended by Ginnie. And so far, so good.

Peru sounds like a remarkably beautiful country – well, as long as one doesn't drink the water.

Camilla says

This was a fun little book without a *lot* of substance, but what was there was good (you'll notice I even shelved it as "art," since much of the book is photography). The book is a published version of Fry's travel/production diary from a trip to Peru filming a documentary on spectacled bears. I learned a bit about Peru, a bit about spectacled bears, and a bit about documentary film making. All of these were interesting, but none went into depth. Still, it was a good introduction to the subject, and entertaining at that. The photographs are lovely, and I'm very happy I read the book. It's not one of Fry's classics, but it's still good and made me more aware of an important issue. I'd say it's done its job.

Jan says

This was excellent. Stephen Fry made a documentary for the BBC about the spectacled bears in Peru (now highly endangered). As he made the documentary, he kept a journal, and this book is the content of the journals.

The book was read by the author, which really added to experience. Part travelogue, part behind-the-scenes-making-of-a-documentary, this is humorous and informative. Stephen Fry is working behalf of a bear rescue group.
