



Care About Bears

Natural History of Black Bears (*Ursus americanus*)

The Omnivorous Carnivore

Highly-intelligent, curious, and opportunistic, black bears are Colorado and New Mexico's largest native carnivore. Despite their canid teeth, bears rely mostly on vegetation for sustenance. In spring, they prefer flowers and grasses, but in the weeks before denning, bears must gain 3-5 pounds per day by consuming 20,000 calories daily. Summer and fall foods include juniper berries, fruits, acorn, piñon nuts, grubs, termites, ants, larvae, rodents, and carrion.

The Life of a Bear

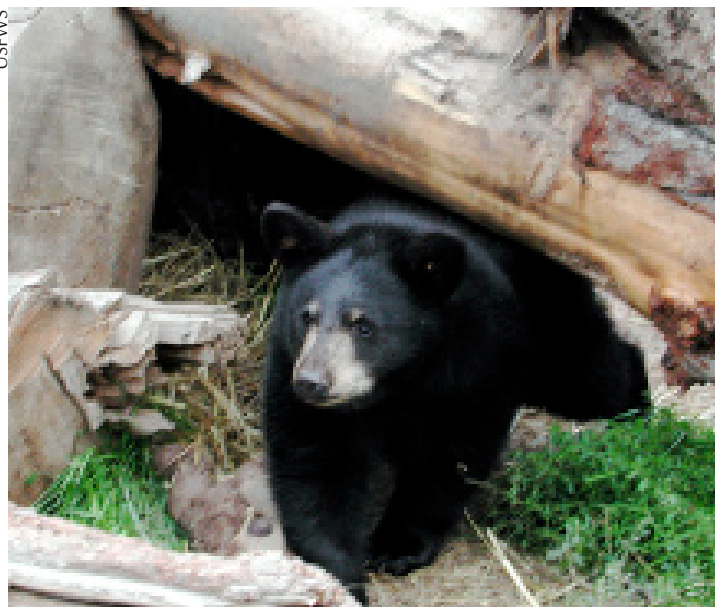
Male black bears weigh on average 250 pounds, and females 150. Equipped with powerful muscles and sharp claws, bears rip logs and tip boulders to grub for insects or scale trees to escape. Bruins' sense of smell is seven times greater than a bloodhound's—they can detect a Snicker's bar under a car seat. Their hearing is exceptionally acute. Bears see in color.

Bears run fast, swim well, and climb trees. They often travel and forage along streamsides. Short distance sprinters, bears can race uphill at 35 mph. Unable to sweat, they swim and bathe. Bears will stand on their hind legs—to smell or see—but not as a defensive posture. Their hind footprint looks human.

Bears maintain home ranges. Adult males' are generally 200-250 square miles, 30 to 80 for adult females. Black bears require a patchwork of vegetation types, including dense escape cover, and movement corridors. They often travel and forage near streamsides. Their scat disperses seeds and nutrients across vast distances.



Dave Jones



USFWS

A Long Winter's Nap

Not true hibernators, bears enter a state of torpor. They can wake and move during their winter naps. Bears usually den in October or November—depending on when food becomes scarce. They bed in caves, tree hollows, or rock outcroppings. During the winter months, their body temperature and breathing lowers slightly; they consume nothing and don't excrete. Bears reabsorb and use their own waste. Amazingly, bears' muscles don't atrophy nor do their bones lose density from inactivity. Males emerge from the den in March or April and females with cubs emerge later in May.



Moms and Cubs

Bears reproduce very slowly. A female typically does not breed until she is five. Bears mate between June and early July. Although her eggs are fertilized in summer, her embryos will not implant until November or January, during torpor. If she is in poor condition from lack of calories or sickness, her body will reabsorb the fetuses to increase survival. If in good shape, a mother will give birth in late January, after three month's gestation, to approximately one to two cubs—born the size of a mouse. Cubs emerge from the den at about ten pounds. Weaned at seven months, cubs remain dependent on their mothers for approximately 17 months. Generally, the mother will not breed again for two years.

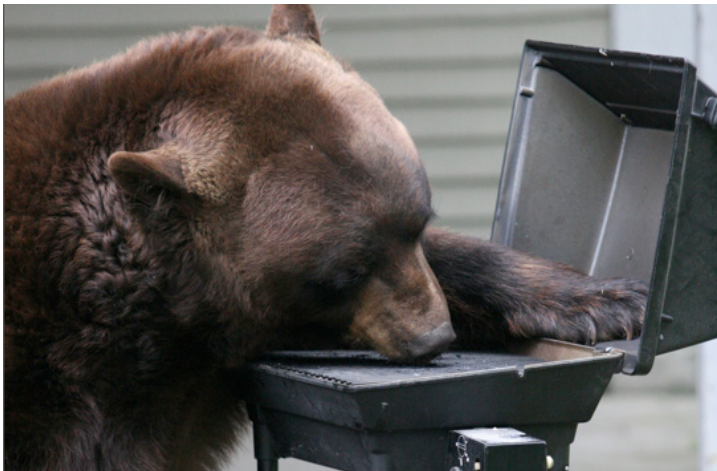
Sensitive Creatures

Bears are sensitive to all sources of mortality. Most bears, 80-90%, die from sport hunters, but they are also killed to protect agribusiness, and increasingly from negative interactions with people who further encroach upon bear habitat and migration corridors.

Bear Aware Tips

If we attract bears, we teach them bad habits, and they will die. This is especially a concern if it involves a mother bear. Cubs imitate their mother's behavior, resulting in a new generation of human-habituated bears. The Colorado Division of Wildlife and the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish euthanize many human-habituated bears each year.

- Don't leave garbage accessible over night. Set out as near to pickup time as possible. Freeze strong smelling foods, such as fish, meat and fruit, before disposing of them.
- Use bear proof garbage containers. Wash containers using ammonia.
- Don't feed birds in spring or summer. Feeders, especially hummingbird feeders, attract bears. Use birdbaths, nest boxes, or plantings instead. Only feed birds in the winter when they need it.
- Clean your BBQ grill; free it of smells; and store it indoors after use.
- Harvest fruit from trees. Pick fruit as it ripens—do not leave it on the ground.

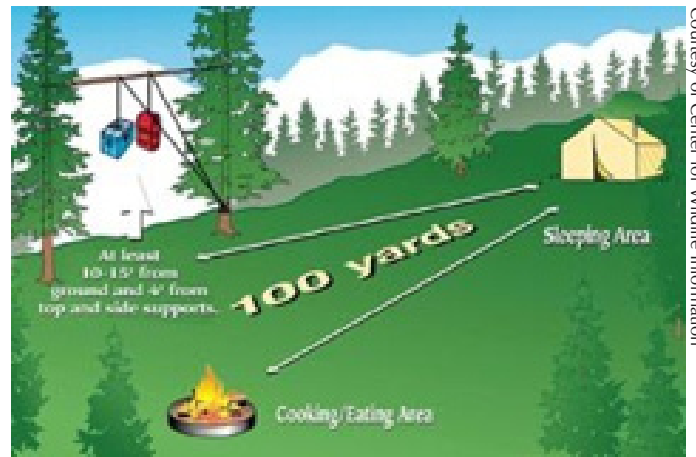


- Keep your lawn clean, mowed, and free of flowering dandelions and clover.
- Keep pet food indoors and feed pets inside.
- Keep bears out of your house. Lock all doors and windows, especially at night. If a bear enters your home, give the bear a way to leave such as through an open door.
- Keep your car clean and free from smells that might attract bears.



Bears are shy and avoid humans. Most negative encounters are defensive, rather than offensive aggression. They defend territories, carcasses, or young—most will likely flee.

- Walk with bear pepper spray (but know how to use it!)
- When hiking make some noise. Talk or sing to avoid surprising a bear.
- Leash your dog. Dogs chase bears.
- Berry patches and riparian areas. You are more likely to encounter bears near their food sources such as berry patches and streamsides—be respectful and back up slowly if you encounter one.
- Hike with children close by.
- Do not run from bears. Running triggers instincts to chase.
- Keep your distance. Face the bear and slowly back away. Avoid direct eye contact.
- Slowly and calmly leave the area. Speak loudly, but not aggressively, so the bear is aware of you.
- Never approach a cub.
- Do not distract bears with food. Throwing food to a bear teaches it to associate humans with food.
- If attacked, fight back—don't lie down. Black bears can be driven away with rocks, sticks, cameras or bare hands.
- If you meet a bear, alert fellow recreationists.
- Select a campsite away from food sources such as oak groves and fruit patches.
- Pitch tents 100 yards away from food prep station. Hang the clothes you cooked in the bear bag. Don't bring any food or even toothpaste into your tent.
- Hang your food, clothes, and toiletries in a bear bag.
- Don't bury or burn garbage—burning creates more intense food odors that are carried on the wind. Pack it out.
- Store all food, including pet food and garbage by hanging at least 10 feet from ground and away from the trunk of the tree.



Courtesy of Center for Wildlife Information





More Information

Being educated is an important part of protecting bears and ensuring wildlife survive for future generations. Excellent resources include:

- <http://www.centerforwildlifeinformation.org/BeBearAware/bebearaware.html>
- Linda Masterson, *Living with Bears*. PixieJack Press. 2006.

Contact Your Local Wildlife Agency Office

If you have a black bear emergency (not a sighting or an encounter), call 911 or contact your local wildlife agency office.

Colorado Division of Wildlife

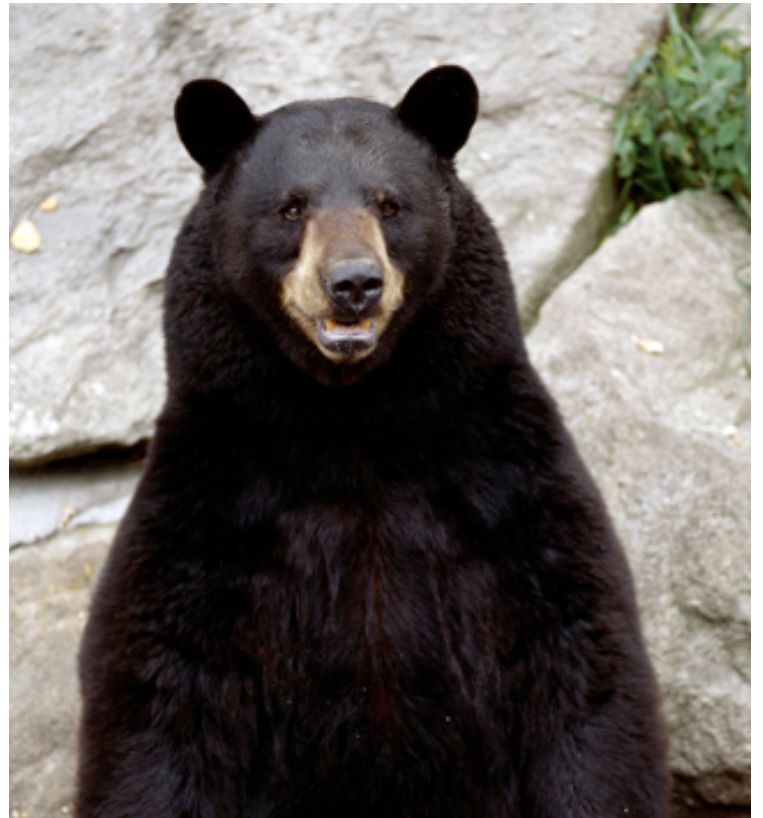
- Brush: 970.842.6300
- Colorado Springs: 719.227.5200
- Denver: 303.291.7227
- Durango: 970.247.0855
- Ft. Collins: 970.472.4300
- Glenwood Springs: 970.947.2920
- Grand Junction: 970.255.6100
- Gunnison: 970.641.7060
- Hot Sulphur Springs: 970.725.6200
- Montrose: 970.252.6000
- Salida: 719.530.5520
- Steamboat Springs: 970.870.2197

New Mexico Department of Game and Fish

- Santa Fe: 505.476.8000
- Albuquerque: 505.222.4700
- Las Cruces: 575.532.2100
- Raton: 575.445.2311
- Roswell: 575.624.6135

Show Your Support

Help ensure that brown bears and other wild carnivores are protected against the many threats they face. Sign up to receive information for WILDEARTH GUARDIANS and stay informed. And please consider making a generous donation to help sustain our important long-term campaign to protect bears, mountain lions, wolves and more.



For more information about how New Mexico and Colorado care about bears, contact Wendy Keefover-Ring at 505.988.9126 ext. 1162 or wendy@wildearthguardians.org.