

# Wildlife Express!

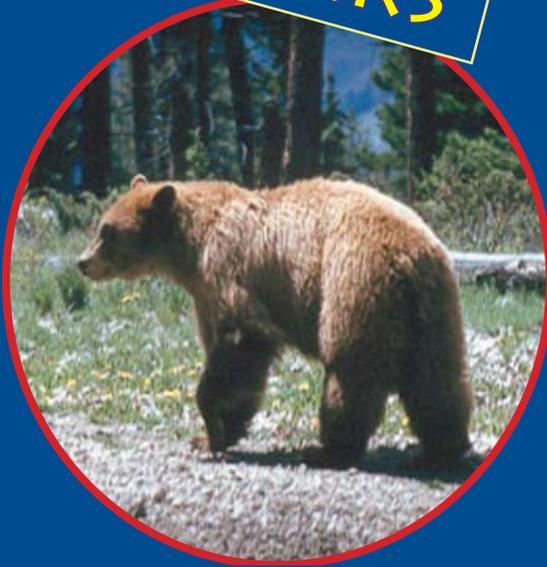
Volume 22

Issue 7

March 2009

## BLACK BEARS

*Photo courtesy Niels Nøkkemvæd*



*Photo courtesy IDFG*

*Photo courtesy IDFG*



# LET'S LOOK AT..... BLACK BEARS

Black bears are the bears you are most likely to see in Idaho. There may be as many as 20,000 black bears living in Idaho! If you go into the forest looking for *truly black* bears, you might be surprised. You are just as likely to find brown, black, reddish or blond colored black bears. There are even some white and blue-colored black bears that live in Alaska and Canada. As you can see, black bears are not always the color black.

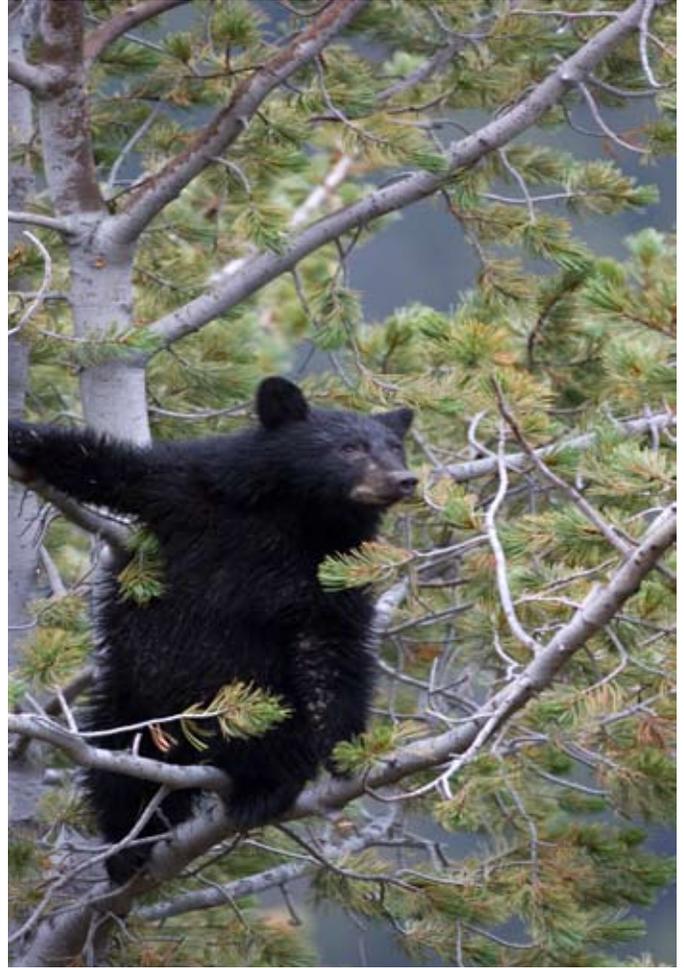
Female bears are called sows. Male bears are called boars, and baby bears are called cubs. How much do you think black bears weigh in Idaho? A fully-grown sow will weigh between 120 and 185 pounds. A boar will usually be 200 to 350 pounds. Some black bear boars may reach weights of 400 pounds, but that is rare for an Idaho bear. Cubs are tiny when first born. They weigh only 8 ounces. That's one-half of a pound! They are only a bit bigger than a can of soda!

Cubs are born around the end of January or first part of February when their mothers are in their winter dens. Cubs are helpless when they are born. Their eyes are closed, and they have only a very thin layer of fur on their bodies. Cubs will snuggle close to their mothers' bellies where they will be warm and find milk to drink. When sows leave their winter den in April or May, the cubs will weigh between four to 10 pounds.

Do you think Idaho bears eat a lot of fish and meat? Many people think bears eat mostly fish and meat, but in Idaho, that is not true. About 98 percent of a bear's diet is made up of plants! The most important food for bears is berries; chokecherries, huckleberries and buffaloberries are favorites. Bears have special tools to help them pick berries – their lips! Bears have prehensile lips. Bears' lips can bend and grasp. Bears can wrap their lips around berries and pull them off one by one. Bears also eat leaves, grasses, water lilies and insects. In the spring when plants are harder to find, black bears search for dead animals to eat. Elk and moose calves, deer fawns, ground squirrels or other small animals may also be on the menu.

Bears have an amazing sense of smell to help them find food. Of all the mammals studied for their sense of smell, the bears' sense of smell is the best. Can you smell dinner from a mile away? A bear can! Bears can probably see as well as humans can, and they can see in color to help them find ripe berries.

Keep an eye out for black bears when exploring Idaho's forest, but don't be too disappointed if you don't see one. Black bears are shy, secretive animals. If they know people are around, they usually hide, climb a tree or leave the area.



*Photo courtesy Don Getty*

# A LONG WINTER'S REST

Have you ever been snowshoeing or cross-country skiing? It's a peaceful way to spend a winter afternoon. A certain kind of hush has fallen over the woods. You might hear birds or see a few animals, but some animals that were out during summer may be a bit more difficult to find.

Many animals are either underground in burrows or hidden in caves. Their body functions slow way down. They don't breathe as often. Their hearts don't beat as often, and there is almost no sign of life. These animals' bodies have sort of turned off for the winter. They may be hibernating.

Do you think black bears hibernate? Years ago some scientists didn't consider bears "true hibernators." When a bear is sleeping during the winter, its body temperature only drops to about 88 degrees Fahrenheit. Marmots are considered true hibernators. Their temperature drops to 38 degrees Fahrenheit. They almost freeze to death! People used to think that since a bear's body temperature only drops a little, the bear couldn't be a true hibernator.

Today, most scientists call hibernating animals that drop their body temperatures close to freezing, like marmots, deep hibernators. Deep hibernators have to wake up during the winter to go to the bathroom and eat. Bears can sleep through the entire winter without having to eat or go to the bathroom. That's amazing! It makes bears special. Bear biologists are now starting to call bears super hibernators.

No matter what words you use, mammals that sleep in the winter have a few things in common. They all need to go into their winter sleep with a thick layer of fat. They eat a lot of food during the summer and fall. Some of the food is stored as brown fat. This special fat is found across the animal's back and shoulders. During the winter, their bodies use the fat like food.

Most animals hibernate and rest during the winter because they can't find enough food. Black bears eat more plants than anything else. Cold weather and snow makes it pretty hard to find juicy fruits and plants. Actually, bears that live in warmer climates don't hibernate at all. They are able to find enough food all year long to keep themselves alive and healthy. Can you think of other animals that hibernate during the winter?

## *Marmots are considered true hibernators*



*Photo courtesy IDFG*

# WILDLIFE AND HUNTING

People have always depended on wildlife. For centuries, wild animals gave us food, clothing, shelter, jewelry, ornaments, containers for water, needles for sewing, utensils for eating and many other kinds of tools. Before people raised livestock or raised crops, having wildlife to hunt meant the difference between life and death.

Today, we can get our food without having to go hunting. But even so, many people still enjoy hunting because they love to eat wild game. Properly prepared game meat is delicious, and many hunters look forward to harvesting an animal for food. Hunters also enjoy the chance to spend time outdoors in wild places. Spending time with friends is another important reason hunters look forward to hunting seasons. Even though we no longer need to hunt to survive, hunting is still an important pastime for many people.

In the past, hunting was a way to make a living for some people. Unfortunately for wildlife, this kind of hunting caused a lot of trouble. In the late 1800s people called “market hunters” almost wiped out some species of wildlife. Market hunters hunted wildlife at all times of year and killed as many animals as they could. The animals were then taken to market and sold. The passenger pigeon became extinct because of market hunting. Bison and beaver are examples of animals that almost became extinct because of too much hunting.

Fortunately for wildlife, other hunters became worried about market hunting. They banded together to help protect wildlife from market hunters. These conservationists helped convince states to set hunting seasons so wildlife could only be hunted at certain times of year. The number of animals a hunter could harvest was also limited. These actions allowed for hunting but also made sure that wildlife populations stayed healthy.

Today’s hunters are proud of their conservation heritage. Many hunters donate their time to volunteer with projects that help wildlife. These projects include things like putting up nesting boxes or planting native shrubs, trees and grasses. Others work hard to make sure that important habitats are preserved for wildlife. These hunters take pride in giving something back to the wildlife resource that is such an important part of their lives.



# GRIZZLY BEAR OR BLACK BEAR?

*Photo courtesy IDFG*



In Idaho we are lucky to have two different bears that live in our state- grizzly bears and black bears. Most of the bears people see are black bears. But if you are in northern or eastern Idaho, you might see a grizzly. Here are some ways to tell a grizzly bear from a black bear.

## Grizzly Bear

- Color varies from blond to black. Usually has dark brown legs with light-tipped fur on head, face and across back.
- Large hump between shoulders.
- Shoulders higher than rump.
- Face is dished in between the eyes and the end of the nose.
- Ears are round and look small on the head.
- Front claws 2-4 inches long, light colored and slightly curved.
- Weigh between 200 to 600 pounds
- 3 ½ to 4 feet high at the shoulder and 6 to 7 feet when standing on hind feet.



*Photo courtesy Don Getty*

*Photo courtesy Don Getty*



*Photo courtesy IDFG*

## Black Bear

- Color may be black, brown, blond, cinnamon or rust.
- No hump between shoulders.
- Rump higher than shoulders.
- Face has straight profile. Muzzle looks long.
- Ears look long and larger on head.
- Front claws are less than 2 inches long, dark colored, sharp and curved.
- Weigh between 100 to 300 pounds.
- 2 ½ to 3 feet high at the shoulder and 5 feet when standing on hind feet



*Photo courtesy IDFG*

# HOW TO GROUP THEM

Taxonomy (taks-ON-ih-mee) is the science of putting living things into groups, or classifying them. Plants and animals that are similar to each other are put into groups. All plants and animals in groups have similar genes (jeans). Part of our genes comes from our father and part of our genes comes from our mother. Together our genes give us our traits, like hair color, eye color or bone structure. Grouping animals helps scientists see how animals are related to each other. Animals placed in a group may look very similar to each other.

There are millions of different plants and animals living on Earth. To group them, scientists start with large groups and break them down into smaller groups. They are first separated into groups called kingdoms. There is a plant kingdom and an animal kingdom. Each kingdom is broken down into smaller groups called phyla (FI-lah). Phyla are divided into classes. Classes are divided into orders. Orders are made into families. Each family is then divided into genera (JEN-air-ah). A single genera is called a genus (GE-nus). Each genus is divided into species. How does it work? Here is how the black bear would be classified.

Kingdom - Animalia (an-ih-mail-yah) – Black bears are animals.

Phylum – Craniata (kra-knee-ot-a) – Black bears have a cranium to protect their brains. This used to be the Chordata phylum.

Class - Mammalia (ma-mail-ee-yah) – Black bears are mammals.

Order - Carnivora (kar-niv-or-ah) – Black bears have teeth that can kill and eat other animals.

Family - Ursidae (ur-sih-dee) – This means the bear family.

Genus – *Ursus* – Bear Species – *americanus* – The bear of North America

Together the genus and species is the black bear's scientific name, *Ursus americanus*.

## WHAT TO CALL THEM

The scientific name of the black bear is *Ursus americanus*. That is a long name and a bit difficult to say. Why use that name? Scientists use scientific names when they talk about animals. That way they make sure they are talking about the same animal. Here is an example.

In Idaho, we have an animal that you may see in the mountains or in the deserts. They love to eat deer. Some people call them mountain lions, but they are also called cougars, pumas, panthers, painters and catamounts. That's six different names for the same animal! Wow, that can be confusing. What if you wanted to tell a person from another country about a mountain lion, but you spoke different languages? By using the scientific name, scientists know they are talking about the same animal, because scientific names are the same everywhere in the world. By the way, the scientific name for the mountain lion is *Puma concolor*.

Scientific names are usually in Latin or Greek. Scientific names tell scientists what group or classification animals are in and often tell you something about the animal. For instance, concolor is the species name of the cougar. Concolor means one color. This makes sense. Cougars are the only wild cats in North America that don't have spots of their coats when they are adults. Americanus is the black bear's species name. Why do you think it is named that? Black bears are only found in North America and nowhere else in the world!



# BE OUTSIDE



It's March—a month that seems to have trouble deciding if it belongs to winter or spring. In spite of its fickle behavior, you can find signs of spring all over the place if you do some sleuthing. One of the first places to start is the trees and shrubs in your yard and neighborhood. Check out the buds along the branches. What are they doing? In the winter, buds are sometimes hard to see. But when spring comes, these buds begin to swell as the flowers or leaves inside them grow. See if you can predict when the buds will burst.

Another fun thing to do with trees is to listen for the sap rising. During the winter months, trees draw their water and sap down into their roots. When spring arrives, this water and sap is once again needed by the rest of the tree. It begins to rise up into the tree. Sometimes you can hear it gurgling inside the tree. The best trees for listening are thin-barked trees like aspen and cottonwood. Take a glass or a stethoscope (like the doctor uses to hear your heart) and put it against the bark. Hold very still and listen as hard as you can. Rising sap sounds like muffled water moving slowly over something.

When the sap starts rising, you know that the soil is starting to warm up. Stick your hands in the soil in several different places to see how it feels. If you have a garden, dig down deep to see how far the warmth has spread. The warmer the soil, the faster plants will grow. Soil organisms become more active when the soil warms up too. Even though March might not know what season it is, everything around you does!

For more outdoor activities, check out the Be Outside website at [www.beoutsideidaho.org](http://www.beoutsideidaho.org)

## HELP! A BEAR!

Many people are fascinated by bears. There are toy bears, bears in cartoons, and even a bear that reminds us not to play with matches. Sometimes people forget that bears are curious, wild, and powerful animals. They are not tame and don't act like cartoon bears. Most bears are shy and don't want to be around people. The best way to avoid a bear is not to get their attention. Here are some things to remember in bear country.

When hiking:

- Never hike alone.
- Look for signs of bears. Tracks, droppings, claw marks, and turned over logs should tell you bears may be near.
- Let bears know you are there. Sing, talk loudly or clap.

When camping in wilderness areas:

- Choose a camp site away from berry patches and trails.
- Sleep in a brown or dull colored tent. Bright colors of red, blue and yellow attract bears.
- Don't cook, eat, or put anything smelly in your tent. Your tent should be at least a football field away from where you cook and eat.
- Hang food, the clothes you cook in, garbage, lotions, toothpaste and anything smelly, a football field away from your tent. Hang things 10 feet above the ground and four feet out from a tree.

If you do see a bear:

- Keep calm and **don't run**. Walk slowly backwards. A calm bear may just be curious. A bear moving around and drooling may be about to charge.
- **Don't turn your back** to the bear. Look at the bear, but **don't look a bear straight in the eyes**. If you look a bear in the eyes, the bear may think that you want to fight.
- If a bear runs up to you, **stand your ground – don't move**. Bears often "bluff charge." That means they run up to you just to see what you will do.
- If a bear is within 30 feet, spray it with **bear pepper spray**.
- If a bear still comes too close, **play dead**. Curl into a ball or lie flat. Cover your neck with your hands and arms. Leave backpacks on for added padding and protection.

**Across**

- 4. The face of a black bear has a \_\_\_\_\_ profile.
- 6. Grizzly bears are \_\_\_\_\_ than black bears.
- 7. Never \_\_\_\_\_ from a bear.
- 8. Black bears are found in \_\_\_\_\_ America and nowhere else in the world.
- 9. The tools bears use to pick berries are their \_\_\_\_\_.
- 10. Bears use their sense of \_\_\_\_\_ to help them find food.

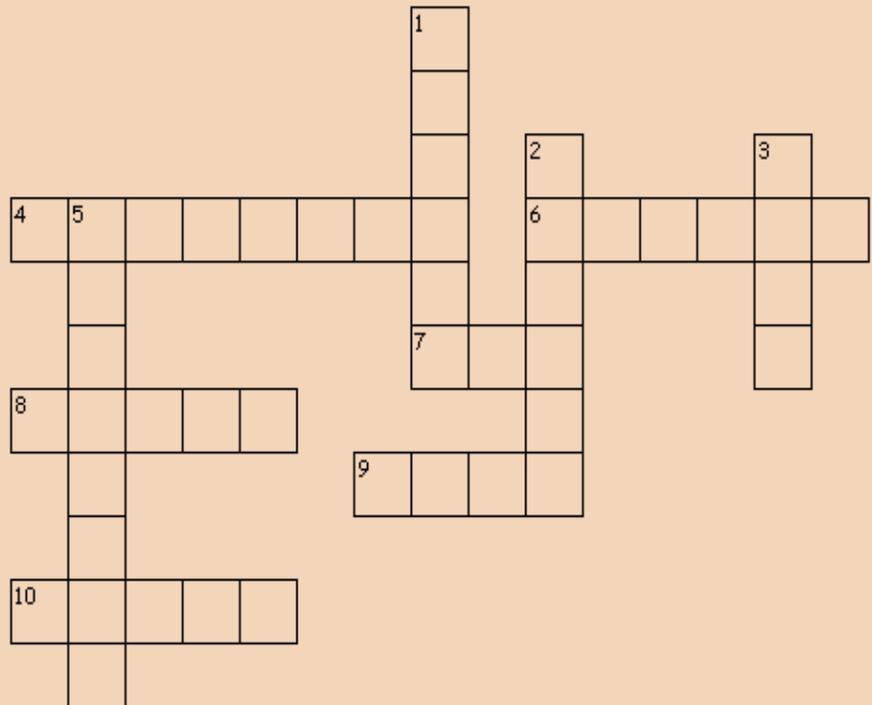
**Down**

- 1. Sows give birth to their cubs during the \_\_\_\_\_.
- 2. Black bears eat more \_\_\_\_\_ than anything else.
- 3. Cubs are \_\_\_\_\_ than one pound when they are born.
- 5. The science of grouping or classifying living things is called \_\_\_\_\_.

Words

Larger  
Less  
Lips  
North  
Plants  
Run  
Smell  
Straight  
Taxonomy  
Winter

# Black Bear Cross



## WILDLIFE EXPRESS

Volume 22 • Issue 7 • Black Bears • March 2009

*Wildlife Express* is published nine times a year (September-May) by the Idaho Department of Fish and Game. Classroom subscriptions and an Educator's Guide are available for \$30.00 per year and includes a classroom set of 30 copies mailed to your school each month. Subscriptions of 10 copies or less are available for \$20.00. This publication is made possible through the sale of wildlife license plates.

*Wildlife Express* is also available on the Idaho Department of Fish and Game website at no charge at <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov>

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### WE WOULD LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU !

If you have a letter, poem or question for *Wildlife Express*, it may be included in a future issue! Send it to the address printed above.

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